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ABSTRACT

This program leader's guide provides suggestions for organizing, administrating, and evaluating a middle school peer helper program. The first chapter builds a case for peer helpers. The problems of youth, peer influence and personal growth, mobilizing student resources, peer facilitators and helpers, four basic helping roles, and advantages of peer helper programs are discussed. The second chapter focuses on selecting a training approach. The academic elective class, summer course, teacher-advisor group, retreat-workshop, school club, and project-focused team are explored. The third chapter examines the primary elements involved in organizing training programs. Program goals and objectives, the program trainer/coordinator, program support, how many to train, how to select the students, when and where to meet, and how to be helpful are discussed. The fourth chapter organizes the training program into four different phases. Getting organized, facilitative skills, decision making and problem solving, and getting ready to help others are discussed. Ethics and confidentiality, responsible referrals, critical moments in peer helping, pitfalls to avoid, and evaluating the training are also discussed. The fifth chapter focuses on implementing peer helper projects. The sixth chapter discusses teaching others in peer-led learning centers. The seventh chapter addresses preventing alcohol and drug abuse. Gateway drugs and illegal drugs are identified. The eighth chapter discusses networking, and the ninth chapter focuses on program evaluation.
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Teaching Helping Skills to Middle School Students:

Program Leader's Guide

by

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and

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An Introduction to Peer Helping

This program is designed for use with young adolescents. It focuses on the preparation of students as peer facilitators or peer helpers in middle and junior high schools. It also can be easily adapted to community settings where the goal is to prepare young people to help others. *Helping Skills for Middle School Students* is the accompanying student book, which contains basic concepts and training activities.

In this leader's guide, trainers and program coordinators are provided with a framework for organizing a peer facilitator program. General concepts are clarified and four helping roles are described. Later, peer helper projects are presented which utilize these four roles. Several training approaches to help prepare peers as helpers are outlined and a set of training sessions are presented. Projects receive special attention, including those that focus on prevention education, such as alcohol and drug use. In addition, procedures for using peer helpers in learning centers and cooperative learning activities are explained. Some sample accountability inventories and forms are also included, which can be used to evaluate training and projects.

This middle school series is a continuation and refinement of the peer facilitator programs, skills, and strategies that have been consistent with our work over many years. The basic facilitative model, featuring six primary skills, has proven to be effective with students at all grade levels, as well as with adults. Our primary goal is to keep matters simple and to focus on concepts that are feasible and practical for young students.

In the future, peer facilitator or peer helper training programs and projects will be common components in every school. There are not enough helpers, and more are needed to help address the developmental issues and concerns of students. Students will never replace professional counselors or guidance specialists, nor will they reach the conceptual and skill levels of adults who have more experience and preparation. However, peer helpers offer a first line of assistance to their peers. They can augment any educational program that a school or community agency might offer.



1

Building a Case for Peer Helpers

Middle school students experience their share of problems as they pass through the developmental stages appropriate to their ages. Peer influence is extremely important at this time. This influence can be used in positive ways. Trained peer helpers can provide timely assistance to others, improve the school learning climate, and experience personal growth.

The Problems of Youth

Young people have problems. Problems are part of growing up and passing through certain developmental stages. Some students, however, are more at risk than others because their problems are more intense and they have fewer resources upon which to draw. These students need special attention.

In most schools there are students who have:

- Poor relationships with their teachers
- Been rejected by their peers
- Problems at home
- Experienced a loss, perhaps a death or divorce
- Received failing grades in their academic subjects
- No future plans and have avoided taking responsibility
- Been pressured by peers into doing illegal activities
- Used alcohol and drugs to escape life's challenges
- Problems making and keeping friends
- Test anxiety and have performed poorly on class exams
- No idea whom they can talk with about their interests, concerns, and problems
- Poor self-concepts

One middle school study showed that less than a third of the student body believed there was someone in school to whom they could talk about their problems. Less than a third said they knew of a teacher or friendly adult available to listen to them. Most agreed that when they or their friends had problems, another student was the best place to find help.

Peer Influence and Personal Growth

As children mature, peer influences become increasingly more important in their lives. Peer groups influence social attitudes and skills, emotional well-being, and the general climate of the school and community. When adolescents behave in dysfunctioning ways, their behavior is often attributed more to their peer relationships than to family interactions. This is especially true for problems related to drug use, delinquency, and sexual behavior. In such cases, it is recommended that treatment or therapeutic interventions involve the peer group, either directly or indirectly. Parker and Asher (1987) provided a review of research studies that outlined the power of peer rejection, especially during the middle school years. Such rejection often provides the base for psychological and adjustment problems that come in the later teenage years and adulthood.

In some schools, the term "peer counseling" has taken a different meaning than when it was first introduced to the literature during the 1970s. At that time it was used synonymously with the terms "peer facilitator" or "peer helper." Now, peer counseling groups are frequently seen as treatment groups, perhaps a class in which troubled adolescents have been grouped together to explore problems that keep them from adjusting or gaining the most from school. This is not viewed, generally, as an exceptional education class, although the group may be led by a teacher who has training in special education. Rather, the group is often composed of at-risk students who have been identified by teachers and administrators as needing time to work on self-esteem or to resolve personal problems.

In this case, training in peer helping skills is considered treatment. Students learn social skills through interacting with each other as they work on their self-interests. Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton (1985) thought it was unreasonable to expect a group of behavior problem youth to somehow generate prosocial values and norms by interacting only with one another. Their point may be well-taken. Most successful peer helper programs focus on helping others through projects rather than focusing only on personal growth. Personal growth is an *outcome* of caring about and helping others.

Mobilizing Student Resources

Counselor-student ratios are high in most schools (sometimes as much as 500:1), making counselors available only in crisis situations. Students who have the most noticeable problems usually get attention, while others must work things out for themselves. Counselors, or other specialists, are too often flooded with clerical work and non-counseling related tasks. It takes an assertive student to gain assistance.

Some students think that no one cares about them and that school is not a friendly place to be. Teachers are responsible for too many students, and classes are too large. Frequently, schools are seen as unfriendly and impersonal.

One way that students can receive timely assistance and feel more a part of their schools is to mobilize student resources—peer facilitators. They can be trained to work with students who are “at risk” as well as those students who are experiencing typical adolescent problems and concerns.

To provide some guidelines for the establishment of peer helper programs, the National Peer Helpers Association (NPHA, 1990) proposed a set of “programmatic standards.” These general standards (i.e. Appendix B) were designed for comprehensive peer helper programs in school or community settings. It is the purpose of this book to provide more specific guidelines. Moreover, we will also see how the standards can be applied to brief training programs with limited projects and to those programs that are more comprehensive with unlimited projects.



Peer Facilitators and Helpers

Peer facilitators are students who receive special training in interpersonal and communication skills. The facilitators help others to think about their feelings and ideas, to explore alternatives, and to make responsible decisions.

Some other terms which have been used to identify peer facilitators include: peer counselors, peer helpers, big brothers and sisters, and peer tutors. It is common for peer helper groups to give themselves a special name. Although names, projects, responsibilities, and procedures might change from one group to another, the central idea is the same—to help others.

Peer facilitators can be trained at all grade levels, although younger students usually require more supervision, have more limited roles, and take part in more structured activities. Peer facilitator programs in middle and high schools usually offer more training opportunities and projects. Cross-age and cross-grade level projects or assignments are also common. However, the skills learned in the peer facilitator program can be applied in everyday life outside a designed project or helping activity.

The developmental guidance and counseling approach, which places less emphasis on seeing students in crises and more emphasis on helping them in advance of serious problems, has been embraced by the American School Counselor Association. As early as 1978, this professional organization took the position that peer facilitators could, by assisting counselors in their work, be of service in a school guidance program. The association again emphasized its position in 1984 and 1990 (See Appendix A). Almost all students can learn to be facilitators. But, with special preparation and supervision, those participating in an organized program can be of great help to peers and create better learning climates in the schools.

Four Basic Helping Roles

After some fundamental training, peer facilitators can participate in various kinds of helping projects. There are four different helping roles around which such projects can be organized.

Student assistant

Student assistants work with teachers and counselors around classrooms and in the guidance or main office. The assistants greet visitors to the school, answer telephones, take messages to teachers and students, construct bulletin boards, help collect or distribute materials or information, and work on routine office or classroom tasks.

Although there is some interaction between the peer facilitator and teachers or students, this role is generally confined to providing indirect assistance to peers. The role is a limited but popular one in schools. It may be the oldest and most traditional helping role that students have assumed in the past.

Tutor

Peer tutors work with other students to improve their work in academic subjects. Many research studies have shown that peer tutoring can improve the academic performance of both the students being tutored and the tutors.

Peer facilitators working as peer tutors provide a new kind of helping relationship, one that begins by acknowledging what the person is experiencing and how feelings and ideas about self enter into studying.

Special friend

As a special friend, a peer facilitator tries to develop a close helping relationship with another student. This friendship can make the difference for some students who feel uninvolved, left-out, or alienated from school.

For the past several years, surveys of students have shown that the most common problem reported is loneliness. It is the by-product of larger schools, indifferent adults, and fast-paced living. Even those students who are considered popular by their peers find themselves rushing around to be with others in order to avoid being alone or feeling lonely.

Peer facilitators learn how to be good listeners and how to treat matters privately. There will be times when they will confront individuals, perhaps encouraging them to seek help from an adult or professional. There may even be times when the peer helper refers someone to a school counselor, or to someone who has authority, or to someone with resources to help. Learning how and when to refer is part of becoming a peer facilitator.

Small group leader

As small group leaders, peer facilitators can make learning experiences for others more personal and exciting. It can be boring and frustrating to be in a large group and have few opportunities to be heard. Most students want to talk with others about their ideas and share their opinions. We also know that most young people attend classes with 30 or more class members. Some are in classes of 40 or more. There is not enough time for everyone to talk and to be heard unless large groups are organized into smaller ones.

In order to have small groups work efficiently, there must be a designated group leader. When that leader is a trained peer facilitator, the group members are more likely to stay on task, to take turns sharing, and to accomplish group goals. For example, a classroom of 30 students can be divided into five groups of six students each. Five peer facilitators, each assigned to one of the groups, can follow the lead of the teacher or large group leader. At a certain time, the smaller groups can be assembled and each person might be encouraged to say at least one thing about a given topic. Thus, all 30 students participate in a few minutes, rather than a few who dominate a classroom discussion as others sit and listen.

Leading groups as a peer facilitator is also good leadership training. Many of the principles applied in this role can be used in other group situations, either as a designated group leader or as a group member who is trying to help facilitate the group.

Advantages of Peer Helper Programs

Myrick (1987) outlined several advantages to having a peer facilitator program in a school:

1. It is a program for all students and helps students learn leadership skills that can be used throughout life.
2. It encourages students to become actively involved in helping their schools have better learning environments. Students communicate more effectively and are more positive with each other. They learn more about how to be sensitive to others and how to stand up for their own rights.
3. It provides more guidance services to students because there are more helpers in the school. Peer facilitators are the helping hands of teachers and counselors. They help deliver guidance services and, consequently, many more students are involved.
4. It is a highly visible program that brings positive public relations to the school's guidance program.
5. It mobilizes one of the most influential and powerful resources in the school-peer relationships.
6. It also offers a "training can be treatment" approach. Some students are less likely to be resistant to learning something when they learn that their help is valued and wanted. Personal growth is an expected outcome for all the peer helpers.
7. It is a positive experience for the program coordinator and trainer. It is often reported as the highlight of a counselor's or teacher's week.
8. It is one of the best staff development programs that counselors and teachers can experience. As they teach students how to be helpers, they invariably become more effective themselves. Counselors report that in their review and teaching of basic facilitative skills, they learn and relearn techniques and strategies which make them more effective in other areas of jobs.

9. It is developmental in nature, going beyond crisis interventions. Peer facilitator programs do not replace counselors or other adult helpers. To the contrary, they tend to increase student referrals. Most important, many of these referrals come prior to events that precipitate a crisis.
10. It enables peers to act as models for other students and to implement effective interpersonal skills as part of the school day. It can help build positive school environments which make school a better place to be for everyone, including teachers and counselors.



2

Selecting a Training Approach

The first few activities in any training program help students to define their roles, to clarify the nature of helping relationships, and to learn and practice a facilitative model which can be used in individual and group work. Next, training is applied in helping projects which can be implemented in school or community settings.

Not all training approaches need be the same. Some are extended over a school year and prepare students for several projects involving all four peer helper roles. Other approaches are shorter in duration and are more limited in terms of training. In these shorter approaches, trainers must be selective of both skills to be taught and the scope of the projects.

The most comprehensive approach, *The Academic Elective Class*, is popular in middle and high schools. It is the study of leadership, communication skills, and interpersonal relationships. Peer facilitator trainers meet with their students every day in a classroom setting. Academic credit is given to those who successfully complete course requirements. The time commitment allows for an in depth approach to both training and implementation of projects.

All other training approaches are variations of the one or two semester academic course. They include: *The Summer Course*; *The Teacher-Advisor Group*; *The Retreat Workshop*; *The School Club*; and *The Project-Focused Team*. All of these alternative approaches are limited by time but are still viable approaches.

As time commitment decreases, so must expectations. Students need time to learn and practice skills. The brief training approaches tend to sacrifice practice time, and trainer/coordinators must provide closer supervision in fewer projects.

A comprehensive discussion of the approaches is presented elsewhere (Myrick & Folk, 1991). A brief description of them will serve our purposes here.

The Academic Elective Class

The elective class is very much like any other academic class. There is a curriculum guide with goals, objectives, and performance standards. Teachers/trainers/coordinators meet with students daily in a classroom during a regular class period. There are textbooks, demonstrations, examinations, projects, and evaluations. Academic credit is given.

The training phase

There might be three components in the first nine weeks of the course: Getting Acquainted (Week One); Skill Building Sessions (Weeks Two to Eight); and Evaluation (Week Nine). During the first week of the course, the trainer begins by helping students get acquainted and outlines the basic procedures for working as a group. Next, the students are assigned readings (e.g. Chapters 1 to 3 in *Helping Skills for Middle School Students*) which focus on the nature of peer helping and principles of human behavior. Possible topics include:

- A. The need for peer helpers
- B. Helping relationships
- C. Awareness of self and others
- D. Human behavior and how people change
- E. Facilitative conditions for effective helping

The next few weeks focus on interpersonal and communication skills, especially from the view of peer helping. Related chapters in the books are assigned on the following topics:

- F. Attentive listening and observing (e.g. Chapter 4)
- G. Facilitative responses (e.g. Chapters 5 and 6)
- H. Decision making and problem solving (e.g. Chapter 7)

How one organizes a program depends on the focus of training and the desired projects (e.g. Chapter 8). The actual format, of course, is determined by each trainer. For instance, some trainers prefer to introduce concepts by first involving students in an activity and then following it with a discussion where concepts and skills emerge. Or, trainers may prefer to have a general discussion of skills in the first part of the week, followed with the activities, and then the practice of skills. The last week of the nine-week grading period is set aside for evaluation. Students might be asked to summarize basic concepts, demonstrate skills in activities, observe other students' performance and provide feedback, or complete a nine-weeks' exam.

The project phase

Subsequent weeks of training focus on more skills, practice, and planning for projects which enable students to implement what they have learned. Projects can be suggested by teachers, counselors, students, parents, or the peer helpers themselves. As students enter into a project phase, specific needs are identified, related skills are practiced, and general procedures are planned for a project. Supervision and evaluation activities are also scheduled.

Some projects are focused and easily structured. They require very little coordination or supervision, such as projects related to school orientation the first week or two of school. Others require more effort because the projects take place in stages. In each stage facilitators assess what has been accomplished and think of the next steps. This may require additional training or involve additional resources.

Peer facilitators need time to share their experiences with other facilitators. They continue with their own personal development and skill building through training activities. After one project is completed, the trainer/coordinator and students select another. Or, a decision may be made to continue or extend a particular project in order to obtain additional gains.

The Summer Course

A summer course is a desirable alternative to the elective class offered during the academic school year. There are some advantages to this approach. First, group cohesiveness among the participants develops rapidly as they meet for a concentrated period of time. Getting-acquainted and getting-organized tasks and activities, which might take place the first week in a regular school class, are presented the first day of the summer session. The time is comparable, but in summer school the concentrated effort can help expedite the starting process.

Secondly, beginning peer helpers are ready to work the first week of school during the registration and orientation sessions. Third, the participants are committed to only one class, which means that they are relatively free from the pressures of other courses. There are fewer distractions, and students can direct their energies to the class objectives. Finally, the summer provides more time for students to visit helping agencies in the community (field trips). They can talk with resource people in the school district and community who might otherwise have too tight a schedule in the school year.

The disadvantages are that students move at a rapid pace and there is less time between lessons to digest and practice skills before moving on. Some beginning skills are so new and awkward to students that they need a lot of repetition. A slower pace also gives a trainer more time to assess peer helper growth and progress.

During the school year, peers trained in the summer can meet in small groups, perhaps during study hall, TAP, lunch period, before or after school. The group might consist of those who have chosen to be part of a particular project. The projects chosen may determine how often the group needs to meet.

A slight variation of these two approaches can be considered a *curriculum unit*. Peer facilitator concepts and skills can be integrated into other parts of the school curriculum during regular academic courses. For example, a classroom teacher may decide to teach verbal and nonverbal skills as part of a communications unit in English. Particular attention might be given to speaking, writing, spelling, vocabulary, and discovering personal meanings. Likewise, a social studies teacher may decide to include the majority of peer facilitator training, emphasizing interpersonal relationships, decision making, problem solving, and social issues. Such interpersonal and communication units are also popular with health educators and those who are assigned to teach life-management skills.

This "class unit" approach is workable, but it also has its limitations. First, it is unlikely that the teacher will be able to screen students for the course. Most often, the students are assigned randomly, although there are some exceptions. Not all students may be motivated to help others or have enough interest to willingly participate in the learning activities. Some may have personal problems that make them unreliable or difficult to trust in projects where peers work with others. Because most teachers hesitate to have one unit consume a full grading period (6 to 9 weeks), the unit is likely to be shorter in duration, perhaps two or three weeks. This totals about 10 to 15 training sessions.

Peer facilitator concepts and skills, therefore, might be introduced in a regular academic course as a curriculum unit. Thereafter, an after-school hours club might be organized where students could design and follow-up with peer helper projects. In this sense, the training lends itself toward a project-focused approach, which is discussed later.

The Teacher-Advisor Group

The teacher-advisor program (TAP) has been described in detail elsewhere (Myrick & Myrick, 1990). In general, this program was first introduced into the middle schools in the early 1960s. It is now becoming increasingly popular in both middle and high schools, especially as attempts to restructure schools are made in order to meet more student needs.

Teacher-advisor programs involve teachers more in developmental guidance. There are not enough counselors or other specialists to meet the needs, concerns, and interests of young people. Therefore, teachers are assigned to groups of students (about 18 to 20 each) who are designated as advisees.

Teachers and their advisees meet on a regular basis in order to know each other better. The task of the teacher advisor is to foster a friendly and caring relationship and to provide a group experience for peers to interact and learn from each other.

Meeting advisees as a group on a regular basis is the key to success. Ideally, TAP is scheduled every school day for about 25 to 30 minutes. Two of the days are typically scheduled for structured group activities which are designed around a developmental guidance curriculum. The other three days of the week are more flexible and used for silent reading, journal writing, clubs, assemblies, guest speakers, tutoring projects or perhaps independent study.

Many of the group activities which peer facilitators experience and process in their training are similar to those used in TAP. The structured activities are related to units of study such as: getting acquainted and making friends, study skills, self-assessment, communication skills, decision making and problem solving, peer relationships, motivation, conflict resolution, wellness, career development, educational planning, and community involvement. These units might last five or six sessions.

In addition, TAP provides a period of time when a group of students might be trained as peer facilitators. A selected group of students who are to be trained as facilitators might be drawn from several TAP classes, perhaps on days when there is more flexible time. This has the appearance of a club and TAP is simply the most convenient time to meet with that club.

Students who want to be peer helpers could be identified and scheduled for the same TAP group. A teacher or counselor might be the trainer. The students become the advisees, as well as the trainees, of the teacher.

In this case, each of the TAP periods during the week—preferably five days a week—are used for training, developing, and implementing projects. One trainer said it took two TAP days to complete what might be accomplished in one day of an elective course. Thus, approximately two and one half hours of training might be provided to students in one week, or 15 hours in a six weeks grading period. A basic training program, providing fundamental skills, can generally be achieved during this period of time. Beginning projects can be started the second grading period, perhaps being implemented on two or three days of the week. The other days might feature continued training and supervision.

Peer facilitators trained in TAP can be assigned to help TAP teachers, perhaps leading or co-leading some of the group guidance activities. In a middle school, one eighth grade group of peer facilitators was assigned to the teacher advisors of sixth graders. The facilitators, after training, assisted the teacher advisors three days a week.

Peer facilitators, no matter where or when they are trained, will find many opportunities to use their skills in TAP. First, they may be part of an advisee group and will probably have had more experience with developmental guidance activities than other students. Training in communication skills will likely have been more extensive and in greater depth. Just being a willing and active participant in the advisor group, a trained facilitator can make a positive difference. Wise teachers will take advantage of having peer facilitators in their TAP groups and create situations where they can help other advisees.

Peer helpers will find TAP an excellent time to see other students for tutoring. They can meet as special friends, perhaps to talk about matters of concern or to simply have more time to develop friendships. They can assist teachers by leading small group discussions. For example, a class of 20 advisees might be divided into four groups of five, each led by a peer facilitator who is visiting from his or her TAP group.

Trainer/coordinators can work with TAP coordinators to plan peer facilitator projects. Neither the facilitators nor the students with whom they are working need to miss their academic classes. It is also a time for follow-up with those who may have been trained in a summer course or a weekend retreat.

The Retreat-Workshop

The retreat-workshop is another approach to training peer helpers. As in the summer course, the workshop is more limited in time, and participants receive an intense and fast-paced experience. The approach has several interesting components which appeal to trainers.

The retreat-workshop is considered the first format ever used for training peer facilitators. The workshop approach was particularly popular during the 1970s before credit courses were introduced. It has remained popular with many middle and high schools, even when elective courses are available. It is an approach that is especially appealing when access to students during the school week is difficult to obtain.

One trainer attempted to complete all training of the students at a middle school during the lunch period. Students brought their food and drink to a room next to the cafeteria, and training was conducted over lunch. But, it was difficult and time always seemed to be too short. Moreover, the skill training seemed to drag on too long before the students felt like they were making progress and could start a project.

This led to meeting the students for a one-day workshop. The students agreed to meet at the school on a "teacher work day," a day when all students are excused from school so that teachers may work on their records and have conferences. The first year, the trainer (a school counselor) worked with ten volunteer students who could be present that day. Several training sessions were tied together and presented. In the weeks that followed, the trainer followed up with the students during lunch periods for additional training and planning projects.

Eventually four schools combined resources and offered a one-day training program for 48 students at a recreational center in a private housing development. The center was free of charge, and students were transported there in cars, with parent permission. This added the feature of enabling students from different

schools to meet and work together. It also added a *esprit d' corps* to each school group, perhaps challenging them to represent their respective schools.

A few years later, the one-day workshop concept was extended to a weekend retreat workshop in the fall semester, where students were transported to a summer camp headquarters. They left Friday afternoon, stayed for two nights, and returned Sunday morning. Meals and lodging were simple, but the setting provided an atmosphere and educational experience which bonded the group together. Billed as a leadership conference, the school district supported the effort and helped fund it. Some teachers at the school volunteered to be chaperons and to participate in the training.

The School Club

Some schools have set aside time for students to participate in clubs. One day a week, for example, was scheduled for clubs in a middle school. The remaining days were for TAP.

Some clubs can meet only before or after school. Peer leaders and helpers could be trained during club meetings. Clubs also might provide an occasion for those who have already received initial training through some other approach, perhaps a summer course, to meet again.

When clubs meet only once a month, for example, there is a lack of continuity and momentum. Training activities are minimum. The time might be better spent in sharing ideas related to peer helper projects.

A school club for peer facilitators, by whatever name, can provide visibility. Therefore, after peers have received training in a retreat or summer course, they might be organized into a club, with a logo, constitution, and goals. The club is a means of tying the facilitators together and giving them an identity.

Meeting on a weekly basis, as many clubs do, would provide the best vehicle for peer facilitators to receive or enhance their training and to discuss their projects.

The Project-Focused Team

A counselor may decide to train a few students, perhaps five or six, for a specific project. A team is formed and the project is explained to them. If the students agree to be involved, then the counselor, in this case, will help them arrange a time when they can all meet for training.

Training is usually limited. It is focused primarily on a particular project. Specific skills are identified which are needed in the project and they are the ones that especially receive attention in training.

A counselor, for example, decided to train ten students to be of assistance in a guidance project to help eighth grade students learn more about the high school curriculum. The counselor decided to meet with eighth graders at their school in groups of about 50 each. Overlays and handouts were carefully prepared ahead of time. The eighth graders were assembled in the cafeteria and the counselor spoke with them as a group. Then the ten peer helpers met with students in groups of five each, answering and referring questions, helping them fill out forms, checking to see that the forms were complete, and then expressing a warm welcome.

Training was project-focused for the team of peer helpers. As soon as the school transition project was completed, the team received a special thank you before disbanding.

One administrator was concerned about the number of non-English speaking students who were transferring to the school. A team of bilingual students (10) were assembled one afternoon as a team. They were given two class periods (about two hours) of training. The facilitators were then asked to be of assistance to teachers in helping new students with limited English skills to adjust to the school.

Specific skills and tasks were tied to specific goals. Because the training time was limited, it was project-focused. This "special friend" project was successful because it relied on students who had skills (a second language and cultural understanding) related to the project.

Project-focused team training usually works best when peer helpers already have some of the skills that they might need. In tutoring projects, for instance, a student who has mastered certain math skills might be able to tutor another student even without training. With a few peer facilitator skills, the tutor can have increased effectiveness, simply by helping to motivate the student even more by providing learned positive reinforcing statements.

Although project-focused teams can help teachers, parents, and community personnel, they are often overlooked as resources. It is a mistake to think that peer facilitators must have extensive training before they can engage in projects. To the contrary, project-focused training is a valuable part of initial training.

Peer helpers want to apply what they are learning as soon as possible. A few projects early in training will help them gain the experience they need to benefit from more advanced training. Through experience they appreciate what they are learning and they ask better questions. They tend to be even more attentive and motivated. They have experienced the challenge of helping.



3

Getting Organized

Some peer helper programs are more comprehensive than others. The training and supervision that students receive is greater in depth and over a longer period of time. There are usually more extensive and varied helping projects. Other programs may be more limited in the amount of training time and, subsequently, concentrate on a few specific skills and projects. Training, for example, can take place in elective classes, clubs, day-long or weekend retreats, or during teacher-advisor periods.

Regardless, all training programs are organized around the same primary elements. Many of the factors discussed here interact with one another. Group size, for example, has implications for meeting place, training approaches, and methods. The comprehensiveness of a program, objectives, and planned projects affect decisions about organization. Let's take a look at some of the things to consider in organizing a peer helping program.

Program Goals and Objectives

All facilitator programs are defined by their goals and objectives. They may differ from one another, depending on the selection of students, the training approach, the extent of the training, and the nature of peer helper projects. Four general goals of a peer facilitator program are:

1. To prepare a selected group of students to be peer facilitators who will:
 - a. Demonstrate specific interpersonal and communication skills which can be used to assist others in decision making and problem solving.
 - b. Participate in one or more of the four basic helper roles: student assistant, tutor, special friend, and small group leader.
 - c. Organize and implement a helping project which assists others, such as a prevention education intervention.
 - d. Assess student abilities and their progress in helping others.
 - e. Know how and when to make appropriate referrals to responsible adults.
2. To provide an organized structure which enables students to enhance the guidance and educational services which are available to all students.
3. To target at-risk students or certain student populations who need special assistance and who would benefit from working with a peer facilitator.
4. To provide an academic and personal growth experience for students who are preparing to be peer facilitators.

At-risk students, for example, might be a special population targeted to receive assistance. Their special needs and interests are identified, especially as related to helping them to be successful in school.

The Program Trainer/Coordinator

The trainer needs to have enthusiasm and energy, a sense of commitment and purpose, a caring and concern for others, and a belief that young people can be a helping force within the school and community. In addition, the trainer must be able to teach interpersonal skills, including demonstrating and modeling them. It is helpful if the trainer is sensitive to the personal growth and societal needs related to special populations.

If you are going to be a trainer, then plan on learning more about yourself and others. Be open to experience, be flexible, and be willing to try new ideas. A sense of humor will go a long way, especially as you explore topics which are personal and sometimes awkward. Avoid stereotyping and the use of common cliches. Identify issues which are sensitive and might be avoided in the absence of a caring and supportive relationship.

Of course, it is important to have a knowledge base about peer facilitator programs, how they are organized, what might be expected of peer helpers, and how to train them for helper roles. In addition to the ideas provided in this particular program, you will find it helpful to study other materials, such as those suggested in the references at the end of this book. It also helps to be creative when the time comes to plan projects for your students.

Two people could agree to coordinate the program and co-lead the training group. One might be the primary trainer, such as a classroom teacher, while the other might be the primary coordinator, such as a school counselor. The trainer prepares students to be peer facilitators, while the coordinator helps develop special projects in which the peers can use their skills. Responsibilities can be shared or divided, based on time available, skills, and interests.

One worthwhile starting place for a coordinator/trainer is self-assessment. What leadership skills will you bring to the program? What are your strengths? What are your personal limitations? What additional skills will you need? What are your goals? Are you an open learner? What do you hope to gain from this experience?

Program Support

Administrative support is one key to a successful start. Make an appointment with your administrative team and talk with them about your plans. Discuss your goals and objectives, emphasizing the merits of the program. Be prepared to answer questions about the value of peer helpers. You may want to point to student needs on your campus and explore what is being done to meet them. Or, you might refer to your school's annual student needs assessment. Then, suggest how a peer facilitator group could help. If you have visited another peer helper program, tell what you saw and heard. Tell how your program will be similar and yet different. Emphasize how the program mobilizes resources and is tied to helping students learn more effectively and efficiently.

The majority of school administrators are only beginning to learn about peer facilitator programs and how they can improve the learning climate in a school. A few principals might be skeptical, perhaps being uncertain as to what peer facilitators do. They might have heard the term "peer counseling" and worry that students would be placed in difficult or compromising situations for which they are not prepared. Peer facilitators are not trained to be counselors. They are not "little psychologists" advising other students. In most cases, it is necessary to help administrators learn more about the nature of the program.

You might begin by describing and giving examples of the four basic roles (student assistant, tutor, special friend, and small group leader). Some examples of helping projects might be useful. Be prepared to cite other schools in the area who have similar programs or who are starting them. Be sure to tell how all of the program's objects are related to helping students to learn more effectively and to gain the most from school. This is not a therapy program, although positive self-esteem, self-confidence, and personal growth are likely outcomes for both the peer helpers and those being helped.

Likewise, this is not a student assistant program or a support group. Although, again, students in training find support from their peers and have an opportunity to be assisted with their own problems, concerns, or issues. Support groups are often made up of all at-risk students, each with a common problem and each needing support and assistance from others. On the contrary, a few at-risk students might be recruited for a peer facilitator training group, but the majority of those in training are fully-functioning and have obtained a degree of personal and school success.

Almost all administrators will like the idea. They may encourage you to start with a few students or to pilot a small program, testing the training methods and trying out a few projects. As it becomes evident that the program has merit, more support will follow and the program can be expanded.

How Many to Train

How many peer helpers should be trained? This decision can influence the entire direction of your program. The more students you select, the more there are to manage and to place in projects. More students means more training time and supervision.

Many successful peer helper programs have started with a small number of students who were accessible, likable, and easy to work with. You might begin with five or six students, perhaps because you enjoy being around them. Or, you may think that they would respond quickly to training and are already suited for some projects you have in mind. A school counselor, for example, might already know a group of students from other situations and decide to ask these same students to continue meeting in order to learn how to facilitate others.

If you are selecting students for a peer facilitator class, then you might choose about 18 or 20, although many first year trainers have started with fewer students (e.g. 12 to 15). Some trainers have worked with larger groups, but they are always presented with the problem of managing more people, more helping projects, and less time for individual attention.

Some schools have more than one peer facilitator class; some trainers have worked with as many as five classes, taking responsibility for 100 or more students. While there are definite advantages to having so many students trained as facilitators, the greatest challenge is to organize projects and create opportunities for them to work in their various helping roles.

Most of the other training approaches limit the number of students to be trained. This number is also determined by the time commitment of the trainer/coordinator and proposed projects.

We encourage you to think of training five or six students as a starter group. You can train more later. Or, if you prefer, you might train a group of 10 to 12 students in order to create a more resourceful learning climate. Students learn from each other through group activities.

How to Select the Students

In selecting the students to be trained, perhaps the first consideration might be accessibility. Are the students available to work with you? Review their schedules and see if they match with the time you have available for training them. Accessibility determines whether you will have continuity and, in the end, play the most important role in terms of how hard you will have to work. Make it easy on yourself and look for students who can attend your training sessions regularly.

Some trainers worry that teachers will resist releasing students to be trained, especially when they must be pulled from a required or elective class where course credit is being given. Teachers have their own agendas and feel pressure to move students through the prescribed curriculum. Therefore, it is essential that they not be inconvenienced. They must agree in advance to a contract that lets the students leave for training. Parent permission may be necessary in these cases.

You may decide to work with a few teachers, perhaps those who have more flexibility in their weekly schedule and who will be cooperative in working with you. They may allow you to have access to students for a certain period of time for training. Thereafter, these students might assist the teachers in class projects. For instance, physical education teachers and those offering elective courses in one school viewed a peer helper program as complementary with their own objectives and made special arrangements with the peer trainer.

Homebase or homeroom periods in middle school are also desirable times to gain access to students, especially when a comprehensive teacher-advisor program is in place. One school found that students could receive six weeks of training by incorporating it in their "exploratory wheel." This is a period during the week when several electives are available and the students rotate through various mini-classes over the school year.

A few trainers have found it possible to offer training after the regular school day, when students are still on campus. For instance, because of bus and activity club schedules, one school provided supervision an extra hour a day before the school buses arrived. Because so many students can be peer helpers and benefit from training, accessibility is often the most important factor to consider when selecting students.

What personal qualities will you look for in students? Some desired characteristics seems obvious: potential for leadership, friendly disposition, positive attitude about self and others, willingness to give time to others, being conscientious and enthusiastic. Verbal skills are valued since most of a peer facilitators' work involves talking with others. Self-confidence and self-esteem are desirable but, like many other traits, they often develop as part of the training program.

It is often easier to train a homogeneous group, one that has similar characteristics and interests. You can expedite training procedures and concentrate on a few specific projects. Or, you may choose to design a program for a diverse group of participants, perhaps one that will reflect your school's general population. Race, gender, specific abilities and skills, and other factors may receive priority as you begin to think of how you will train your group and what they will do after they have been trained. Students trained as peer helpers can work with any student, regardless of ethnic origin. They will be trained as facilitators and learn skills which cross cultural grounds.

Remember that "training can be treatment." In this sense, the training program might assist a student who is in need of help and who would benefit from training in communication and interpersonal skills. Some students are on the edge or only beginning to get into trouble with teachers or others. The training program may be the best intervention for them. It gives attention to attitudes, behaviors, skills, and it gives them positive recognition. It says that you believe in them and that they can be responsible helpers.

Selection of students is also influenced by program goals and objectives, your personal interests, and the kinds of projects you plan to implement. For example, a math tutoring project may require mastery of certain academic skills, as well as knowing how to encourage and motivate a math student.

You might rely on teacher recommendations for training and related projects. Encourage the faculty and staff to provide the names of students who they believe will be effective facilitators. These students are then asked to attend a meeting in which the program is explained and applications are distributed. Later, an open invitation to the student body might be extended.

As part of the application process, you might prefer to meet with applicants individually or in small groups prior to selection. Interviewing the students can give you additional information, especially regarding their concern for the welfare of others and how they initially interact with others. It also gives you a chance to imagine how they might function in class, what special training they might need, and the particular contributions they might make. You can tell them the kinds of projects you have in mind, perhaps some which will focus on at-risk students or the prevention of alcohol and other drug use. Their reactions to your proposal may determine interest and commitment.

It may be helpful to have an application form (e.g. Figure 1). Sometimes applicants are also asked to complete a self-assessment scale (e.g. Figure 2). These formal procedures can give immediate credibility to your program, suggesting that it is a privilege to be selected and that attention is given to how students respond to some items. The application process also has a way of eliminating those who are unsure or perhaps less motivated to take part in training and helping projects.

Figure 1 Peer Helper Application

Name _____ Age _____ Grade _____

Telephone No. _____ TAP Advisor _____

Class schedule: _____

1st period: _____ 4th period: _____

2nd period: _____ 5th period: _____

3rd period: _____ 6th period: _____

Directions:

Please answer the following questions as best you can. They are designed to have you think about yourself and about being a peer helper.

1. What are some of your greatest strengths that would make you a good friend and helper to others?
2. What is something that you need to improve that would make you an even better friend and helper to others?
3. How did you hear about our peer helper program and what made you decide to apply?
4. List two teachers who you think would recommend you for this program.
5. What are some hobbies, skills, or activities that you like to do with others?

Figure 2

Peer Helper Self-Assessment

Directions:

Please evaluate yourself honestly by checking each of the items. Use the following numbers to indicate your response: 5 = Almost always; 4 = Most of the time; 3 = Some of the time; 2 = Seldom; 1 = Almost never

	Your Rating				
	5	4	3	2	1
1. I respect the rights of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I am friendly with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I am dependable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I worry about being liked by others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I like being a leader.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I can accept criticism.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I am overwhelmed with my problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I have good judgment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I wish I weren't in school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I am courteous and polite.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. I get along with teachers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. I am energetic.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. I am sensitive to other's feelings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. I am a careful listener.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. I can be trusted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. I have trouble controlling my emotions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. I be counted on to follow through with tasks and assignments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. I have a sense of humor.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. I am open to new ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. I am not very hopeful about the future of the world.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

When to Meet

When is the best time in your own schedule to meet with five or ten students? How does this time correlate with the times the students are available? Is there a study hall or a class period when you can meet with students which will not disrupt their academic classes?

Peer facilitator courses for elective credit are scheduled for a regular class period in the school day. In addition to training which can occur during the regularly scheduled class period, the same time period can be used for projects. More specifically, one program featured nine weeks of initial training in communication skills and the helping relationship. In the second nine weeks, the students worked in helping roles around the school two or three days a week, during the exact time that they usually met for training. The remaining days were used for processing their cases and experiences, receiving supervision and additional training.

A few schools offer credit courses during the "zero hour." This is time before or after school especially designed for electives. This allows students to attend a full day academic schedule and still participate in a challenging and rewarding elective. Summer courses, as an alternative training approach, enables students to meet for training prior to the school year and have fewer schedule conflicts during the school term.

Or, perhaps you have decided to use one of the approaches described earlier. That approach tends to dictate when you will meet. For example, will you use the club approach? The retreat approach? You might, for instance, make arrangements to meet with the middle school students who are in training for one school day. Then, to follow-up on the training, use a variety of times to meet with them each week.

Other options (non-credit) include meeting once a week during lunch, or homeroom, or drawing students from a class, perhaps like a club. If study halls are available, you might recruit students from a study hall period. You can also meet before and after school, perhaps on a weekend or one evening a week, especially if you want to complete some initial training.

One of the most desirable times to meet with peer helpers in middle schools is during teacher-advisor program periods, especially if the program has a schedule in which students meet each school day with their advisors. It is even possible that the trainer would volunteer to be the teacher advisor to the training group, thus reducing the number of students assigned to other teachers. In addition to training activities, helping projects can also be developed for implementation during this same period of time. For instance, peer helpers can meet with students who are having trouble adjusting to school (special friend) or perhaps provide some timely encouragement. Tutoring sessions can be arranged and peer helpers can also go to teacher-advisor groups to assist teachers, perhaps as small group leaders or co-leaders of group activities.

Where to Meet

The advantage of training a small group, perhaps five or six, is that there is usually a space in your school building which can accommodate such a group. As you increase the number of trainees, then space becomes a more important consideration. It may well influence the number of students you will select for your program.

Ideally, the room should be relatively private. However, if the counseling office has no space and there is no conference room available, then you might want to use a corner of the media center. Or, perhaps you can negotiate a place to meet with another faculty member, at least for the duration of the training activities.

If you have a regularly scheduled class, you will probably have an assigned classroom. This is the best situation. Depending on the size of your group, you might meet in other areas throughout the school, such as: media center, cafeteria, conference room, auditorium stage, or any unscheduled location where you can assemble your group. Try to find a place where you can meet on a regular basis in order to help the students to feel comfortable and to form some routine procedures. This helps expedite matters.

How to be Helpful

There are many things that peer facilitators can do to be helpful (e.g. Myrick & Sorenson, 1988; Myrick & Folk, 1991). You can modify some established projects, perhaps those that have stood the test of time, and tailor them for middle school students. For instance, a tutoring project might target low-achieving students.

Encourage your trainees to apply the same general considerations of being trustworthy, sensitive, and showing personal regard in their training. After all, there will be many opportunities for students to learn how to handle sensitive information in the course of training. Then, help them think of how they would want to be treated. What are some realistic expectations for a facilitator? When might they share private information with the trainer or project coordinator? What are some general guidelines and procedures which might be followed?

Role playing can help facilitators become more comfortable with difficult situations. They can practice how they might reassure someone, without promising confidentiality. They can practice how to tell someone that their information will not be used to hurt them, without promising confidentiality. When a peer learns that someone with whom they are working is in danger but is afraid to seek the help of others, then some caring and helpful action must be taken. This may mean telling the person that the information must be shared with a school counselor, or other professional helper. It may mean that the two of them might go somewhere together in order to receive help. Peer facilitators provide support, have in mind the best interests of whomever they are working with, and avoid the paralysis of promising to "keep a secret."

These same principles of being trustworthy and respectful also might apply to trainers. As training groups become more cohesive, there are more personal disclosures. Because of the nature of training, the topics, the activities, and the personal growth and development emphasis, trainers and trainees must follow the same general principles, including some other ethical considerations.

In another section of this book, several helping projects are presented for consideration. They may stimulate you and your students to think of projects that may be done in or out of the schools in your area. Some may take place in community settings. The primary goal is to train peers to be helpers and then put them in situations where they can help others.

There is some evidence that simply training students in helping skills is not enough. Learning communication and interpersonal skills is almost always a valuable experience. Some peer counselor groups, for instance, have become self-contained support groups and members work with each other. If students are to find special meaning for themselves and learn to integrate the concepts in their daily lives, then the skills must be applied. The most significant personal growth experiences come through helping others outside the training class.

Training activities focus on fundamental theories about helping others, facilitative skills, and roles in helping projects. Training approaches may vary, depending on commitment, the time available, and the purposes of the program, but the training activities are directly related to what peers are expected to do when working with others.



4

Training Your Helpers

The student book, *Helping Skills for Middle School Students*, contains the communication and helping concepts the students should learn. At the end of each chapter are one or more training activities. Additional training activities can be added as desired. More resources are listed in the bibliography.

The number of activities actually used in training will be influenced by the kind of training approach that you use (e.g. elective class, summer class, club, and so forth). In general, most training programs will feature about 12 to 20 training sessions and use activities similar to the fourteen basic training sessions outlined in Table 1. This limited training program, of course, can be adjusted to fit the approach you have decided to use.

A program is generally organized into four different phases, each featuring different tasks and activities: Initial Training; Project Preparation; Project Implementation and Evaluation; Additional Training and Closure.

The beginning or initial phase of training involves activities which help the trainees become acquainted and learn about helpers. For example, after some easy self-disclosing exercises, which help form a working group, the topic "Who are the Helpers?" is introduced. Students talk about the people who provide helping services and how helping relationships are formed. Students learn best by doing. They will enjoy coming to class and participating in activities which are related to what they are studying and the projects they will be implementing.

The second phase of training focuses on preparation for helping projects, with particular attention given to the four helper roles. A student body needs assessment could provide clues regarding projects which can be developed by the trainer, teachers, or students. During this phase, projects are outlined according to the target population served, objectives, materials needed, activities and helping strategies, and general organization of the peer-vention.

The third phase involves the implementation of a project or delivery of services. The peer facilitators have received their initial training and outlined their basic plan for the project. They now begin their work with the students to whom they are assigned. This phase also includes exploring their progress in supervision, receiving additional training, and evaluating the effects of their efforts.

The fourth phase entails a final evaluation of projects, the program and closure. Peer facilitators plan how they will conclude their work and what they will say and do to end their meetings. They also think about the impact of the program on their own lives and recommendations for the future. Celebrations and fun-filled events are typical during the final few weeks of the program.

Table 1
A Basic Training Program

The following one-hour sessions might be used to start a basic program for middle school peer helpers. The training activities and the related readings are in *Helping Skills for Middle School Students* (Myrick & Sorenson, 1992). The meetings may be divided into half-hours, resulting in 18 to 20 training sessions, and tailored to different training approaches.

PART I: Getting Started

Session 1: Introductions and Organization

Read Chapter 1—Peer Helping and the Facilitative Model

Activity 1.1 "What's It All About?"

Session 2: The Nature of People

Read Chapter 2—The Nature of People

Activity 2.1 "Who Am I?"

Activity 2.2 "The Over-Night Express"

Session 3: The Facilitative Conditions

Read Chapter 3—Relating

Activity 3.1 "Who are the Helpers?"

Activity 3.2 "Problems of Middle School Youth"

Session 4: Learning to Listen

Read Chapter 4—Listening

Activity 4.1 "Listening for Feelings"

Activity 4.2 "How I See the World"

PART II: The Facilitative Skills

Session 5: Three High Facilitative Responses

Read Chapter 5—Responding

Activity 5.1 "Learning to be Facilitative"

Activity 5.2 "Listening in a Debate"

Activity 5.3 "What's Happening with Today's Youth?"

Session 6: Facilitative Feedback

Read Chapter 6—Giving Feedback

Activity 6.1 "Discussing Unfinished Sentences"

Activity 6.2 "Compliments and Confrontations"

Activity 6.3 "Giving and Receiving Feedback"

PART III: Decision Making and Problem Solving

Session 7: Steps in Problem Solving

Read Chapter 7—Deciding

Activity 7.1 "Making Decisions"

Activity 7.2 "The Problem-solving Model"

PART IV: Getting Ready to Help Others

Session 8: Planning Peer Helper Projects

Read Chapter 8—Helping Projects for Peer Helpers

Activity 8.1 "Role Playing"

Activity 8.2 "A Cry for Help"

Activity 8.3 "Role Reversal"

Session 9: Follow up and Evaluation

Problem Moments and What Would You Do

Role Playing Situation

Evaluating the Process and Outcomes

The nine sessions shown in Table 1 might be completed in 9 to 10 hours, although all the listed activities might not be used. The structured learning activities give students in training an opportunity to experience concepts or practice skills. If time is limited, the second activities in the student book might be viewed as supplementary. Select those activities that seem most appropriate or appeal to you and your students. You may prefer to substitute some of your own favorites and relate those to program concepts and skills.

A modified plan that might be used in 12 half-hour sessions is presented in Table 2. In this case, the chapter readings in the student book remain about the same. However, concepts and activities are slightly reorganized. Some of the concepts, as well as the skills, are presented in more succinct segments. Special attention is given, for example, to the three high facilitative responses (feeling-focused, clarifying and summarizing, and open questions) as a base for responding. One session is aimed at leading small group discussions. For the most part, training is completed in the first 12 sessions and the remaining sessions are used to plan helping projects. As a brief training approach, this model might be suitable when preparation time is restricted or when projects are limited.

Table 2

A Brief Training Program

The following topics and sessions represent a brief program based on the concepts and training activities presented in the student book, *Helping Skills for Middle School Students* (Myrick & Sorenson, 1992).

PART I: Getting Organized and Getting Started

Session 1: Introductions and Organization

Activity 1.1 "What's It All About?"

Chapter 1

Session 2: Getting Acquainted With Self and Others

Activity 2.1 "Who Am I?"

Chapter 2

Session 3: The Facilitative Conditions

Activity 3.1 "Who are the Helpers?"

Chapter 3

Session 4: Problems Facing Young People

Activity 3.2 "Problems of Middle School Youth"

PART II: The Facilitative Skills

Session 5: Listening—Pleasant and Unpleasant Feelings

Activity 4.1 "Listening For Feelings"

Chapter 4

Session 6: Responding—3 High Facilitative Responses

Activity 5.1 "Learning to be Facilitative"

Chapter 5

Session 7: Listening and Responding

Activity 5.2 "Listening in a Debate"

Chapter 5

Session 8: Facilitative Feedback—3-Step Model

Activity 6.2 "Compliments and Confrontations"

Chapter 6

Session 9: Leading Group Discussions

Activity 6.1 "Discussing Unfinished Sentences"

Chapter 6

PART III: Decision Making and Problem Solving**Session 10: Decision-making Model**

Activity 7.1 "Making Decisions"

Chapter 7

Session 11: Solving Problems

Activity 7.2 "The Problem-solving Model"

Chapter 7

Session 12: Problem Moments

Activity 8.1 "Role Playing"

Chapter 8

PART IV: Getting Ready to Help Others**Session 13: Planning Peer Helper Projects**

Activity 8.2: "A Cry for Help"

Chapter 8

Session 14: Follow-up and Evaluations

Ethics and Confidentiality

Codes of Ethics

Teaching students to respect the rights, dignity, self-direction, and self-development of a person is a paramount goal of peer helping. This is one reason that caring, respect, personal regard, understanding, and being trustworthy are words that characterize a helping relationship. This includes peer helpers or facilitators as well as professional teachers and counselors.

A code of ethics for peer helpers is presented on page 160 of the student book, *Helping Skills for Middle School Students*. In addition, a code of ethics for peer helping professionals (See Appendix C) has been advocated by the National Peer Helpers Association (NPHA, 1990). It is an attempt to reach an agreement among those who are committed to training young people as to the norms that guide behavior during involvement in peer helper programs.

Confidentiality

One of the most difficult issues is the one of confidentiality. Even though peer helpers have been carefully and systematically trained, they do not have privileged communication. They cannot legally or unequivocally promise confidentiality, as it is related to counseling, therapy, or other helping professions. Yet, the issues of privacy, trustworthiness, and referral procedures are considered essential components in a comprehensive training program.

Responsible Referrals

Although privacy and the desire for confidentiality are recognized as part of most helping relationships, there are certain times and exceptional cases when a referral must be made to professional staff or a responsible adult. In general, these include:

1. When there is real or potential danger to the safety or well-being of someone, including the helper or helpee.
2. When child abuse, sexual abuse, or other situations are present and legal requirements demand disclosure.
3. When severe dysfunctioning behavior or abuse are beyond the expertise of the helper.

The referral process

It is the responsibility of every trainer or peer helper program coordinator to make sure that the peer helpers know how to be responsible in their working relationships with others and how to make referrals when appropriate. The following describes the usual flow of events.

1. The peer helper will provide a friendly and caring atmosphere, creating the conditions of trust, respect, personal regard, and understanding.
2. The primary facilitative mode will be that of being a careful listener.
3. Support and encouragement are provided via high facilitative responses. There are no promises of confidentiality as part of building a working relationship. There is no pledge of secrecy.
4. When exceptions to privacy are necessary, a referral will be made to the helper's immediate supervisor or program coordinator, who will in turn follow-up with the case and take appropriate action.

5. When a referral is made, the peer helper provides support and encouragement, continuing to treat the matter with the utmost respect and regard. The situation continues to be honored with discretion.
6. When desired, it is appropriate for the peer helper to accompany the person in the referral process, being present as a support person when an adult is asked to become involved. Thereafter, future involvement by the peer becomes a professional judgment of the adult.

Referral guidelines

It is not always easy to make a referral. Peer helpers learn that this is not a sign of failure or inadequacy; rather, it is a case of good judgment and a deep sense of caring. When a difficult problem needs special attention, the peer must care enough to take action, even if it meets with resistance by the person who needs assistance.

As you talk with the peer helpers about making referrals, you might ask them to consider the following:

1. Speak slowly, choose your words carefully, giving the helpee time to think about what you are saying. Allow your words to make an impact.
2. If it helps, ask yourself the following:
 - "What kind of relationship do we have? Does my helpee trust me and know that I respect him or her?"
 - "How would my helpee describe me at this point?"
 - "What are the specific things that concern me?"
 - "What are my responsibilities?"
 - "How can I best help?"
 - "Who else can help?"
 - "What are the next steps?"

Critical Moments in Peer Helping

Directions:

Look at the statements that follow. You may want to select a few to discuss with your trainees. They could think of problems and situations that might go with each of the examples.

1. Joe is angry. Stacy, at one time a good friend, has been telling others that Joe was running around with older guys who were getting drunk on the weekends. He tells you that he is going to put Stacy in his place by challenging him to fight after school. What do you do?
2. Deborah has told you that she is worried about her best friend who is very depressed about school and some of the things that are happening at home. Deborah's friend has said, "I'm going to kill myself if things don't get better." Deborah is asking you for help. What do you do?
3. Jon is sleeping in class. He dozes off and the teacher gets mad at him. He also says that he is mad and tired of being picked on. Jon and another boy are planning to break into the teacher's house and "trash it." What do you do?
4. Allison is crying and she says that you are the only person she can trust anymore. She wants to tell you about a secret that she has, but she doesn't want you to tell anyone else. She's worried and she asks you to promise absolute secrecy. What do you do?
5. Rachel failed English and science this past nine weeks. She is afraid that her parents will punish her. They have threatened to do it in the past. Rachel said she isn't going home tonight. She says she is going to run away to a place in another city and state that she has in mind. What do you do?

6. Chris has been cheating in his second period social studies class. Another boy, in the first period class, has been letting him copy homework assignments and has secretly slipped him the answers to tests while they pass in the hallway. The teacher is starting to become suspicious of Chris and wonders who is helping him. The teacher knows that you have been working with him as a peer helper but is unsure of your role and what you do. What do you do?
7. Julie said she didn't want it to happen, but it did. Her boyfriend forced himself on her. She's not sure if what happened is rape or if she is responsible for leading him on. She's confused and you are the first person with whom she has talked. What do you do?
8. Richard tells you that he belongs to a gang. He likes being around his buddies, but some of them are starting to do illegal things. He thought it was fun, at first, and now he has second thoughts. He'd like to quit the gang, but he's afraid that they won't let him because he knows too much. "I think they are going to get me, somehow, so I just have to hang in there." What do you do?
9. Martha was a new student at the start of the school year. A boy asked her if she would go to a party with him and she said yes. Later, she learned that the boy's ex girl friend is spreading rumors about Martha, saying that she was "easy" and just a "play thing" for him. Martha was so hurt and frightened of the girl that she didn't want to see the boy anymore. But the boy persisted—and so did the rumors. What do you do?
10. Allen hated physical education classes. He had to undress in front of others, which made him very self-conscious. This led other boys to tease him. He said he would not "dress out" any more, even if it meant that he was going to fail the class. He was sure that everyone was laughing at him. What do you do?

Suggested responses

You will note that all of the following responses focus on feelings and that all have some element of reassurance and support. But, the referral is straight forward. There is no attempt to diagnose or interpret a person's problem. In some examples, the feedback model is incorporated. You might ask: Which ones appear to be most effective or least effective? Why? What other words might be used to make a referral? And, who are the referral sources? How could the statements be edited or changed to fit a particular situation?

1. "I sense that something is bothering you. I appreciate your trust and confidence, especially in telling me about your situation. You're feeling overwhelmed right now and want to talk more about it. Now, let me be honest with you. I want to help, but if this involves (the ethical issue)... then...."
2. "Let me interrupt you at this point. You're telling me something that is very important to you. I want to help, but first you should know that... (cite responsibilities)...."
3. "I'm sure that you can work this out. I want to help and I also know that (name of counselor) can help. How would you feel about our talking with (her or him) about this matter?"
4. "You're confused and wondering what to do next. What do you see are some possibilities (i.e. talking with an adult or professional)?"
5. "You're uncertain right now and would like some advice. Perhaps we can think about this matter together and discover some possible next steps (i.e. a referral source)."
6. "This is not an easy situation for you. It really does need our immediate attention. Let's talk some more about this matter and think of some next steps (i.e. a referral source)."
7. "You are in a tough situation. You're confused and wondering what to do (pause). I suggest that you talk with. _____ (name of counselor or adult). He (or she) can be of special help. Do you know who he (or she) is? What do you know about him (or her) and his (or her) job? I would be happy to go with you and introduce you."

8. "This has not been easy to talk about. But, you have shared with me some information that is having a big impact on your life. I think you need more help—some special help from someone who has experience in these things. So, I want you to talk with one of the school counselors. They are trained to help and they have worked with other students who have had similar problems. What do you know about the counselors? Which ones do you think you could talk to about this matter? Let's go together and I'll stay right there with you, if you want. Otherwise, you can talk with one of them in private."
9. "It took some courage to tell me about your situation. Thanks for trusting and having confidence in me. Now, I must be frank (straight forward) with you. This is a matter that needs more attention. It will help to talk more about your problem, but it needs to be done with someone who has experience in helping people in situations like yours. The first person who comes to my mind is _____. What do you know about him (or her)? When would be a good time to see him (or her)? If you would like me to, I'll go with you."
10. "I'm sorry, but you are asking me to do something that I can't do. You have told me about your situation in private, trusting that I would listen and be of help. I cannot keep what you told me a secret. That would be the wrong thing for me to do and would not be helpful to you. You will not be able to keep your secret much longer and, in the meantime, you need to talk with someone who is trained to help you think about some possible next steps. So, let's go talk with _____. She (or he) will listen to you. I am confident that she (or he) can help you think this matter through and find a good solution."

11. "I know that you told me about your problem, hoping that nobody else would know. But, this is a secret you can't keep for long. Somebody is going to find out sooner or later. And, I think you told me because you want to talk with someone about the best possible solution. It's time to talk with _____. You can talk privately with her (or him). She (or he) can be very helpful. With her (or his) help and your courage, you can work out this problem. I will also continue to be your friend, as long as you want me to help."
12. "The best way for me to help you, then, is to get you to talk with _____. What do you think about that?"
13. "When you said that you didn't want me to tell anyone else about your situation, that made me feel uneasy. I wanted to listen to you and give you a chance to think about your problem. Now, I am even more uneasy because I realize in order to best help you, we have to talk with _____. But, we can do this privately and together. Come on, let's go together."
14. "I care about you. I want help, but both of us are unsure of what to do next. You need help and you need it now. You're feeling really low and confused. What you are facing is tough and there is no reason for you to have to face it alone. Let's think about who else can help. (Guide the person toward a professional counselor or responsible adult.) "Okay, let's think about what you might say to him (or her) to get things started."



Pitfalls to Avoid

Experienced leaders (coordinators/trainers) have described some pitfalls which beginning trainers might try to avoid. Among them are the following:

1. Failing to tie the program to helping all students learn more effectively and efficiently.
2. Emphasizing counseling theories and skills more than facilitative roles and skills.
3. Using inappropriate and irrelevant training activities.
4. Lacking systematic training.
5. Lacking helping projects and the tendency to become only an academic psychology course or support group.
6. Lacking project supervision and follow-up training.
7. Expecting too much of students and failing to teach them how to set limits and refer students with whom they are working.
8. Lacking accountability.
9. Failing to look for ways in which peer facilitators can assist in developmental learning, as well as problem-centered projects.
10. Failing to teach peers how to make responsible referrals.
11. Fearing mistakes and avoiding risks.
12. Becoming too serious and not enjoying the adventure.

Evaluating the Training

As a trainer, you will have an opportunity to present ideas and observe students as they study and put ideas into practice. The activities are designed for students to learn and practice skills. Some projects may require specific kinds of skills and you will want to introduce them in a special session or two. For example, a tutoring project may require peer helpers to be familiar with a computer program. In order to take part in leading a learning center, peers may need to become more familiar with the materials and to study specific classroom procedures.

It might be helpful to collect data on how well your students are progressing in their training. Some trainers design and administer tests. Others prefer to have the students demonstrate their skills in role-playing activities. Students can be asked to share their ideas and feelings in a personal log or diary. Still other trainers like to have the students assess themselves, using such inventories as those presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3

Facilitative Skills Checklist

Instructions:

Think of your peer facilitator experiences. Indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the following statements by marking the scale: (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree).

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. I maintain good eye contact. | SA A NS D SD |
| 2. Most of my responses follow the lead of the other person. | SA A NS D SD |
| 3. I am able to ask open-ended questions. | SA A NS D SD |
| 4. I can restate or clarify a person's ideas. | SA A NS D SD |
| 5. I can make statements that reflect the person's feelings. | SA A NS D SD |
| 6. I can share my relevant feelings. | SA A NS D SD |
| 7. I can give feedback to others. | SA A NS D SD |
| 8. At least 75% or more of my responses are high facilitative. | SA A NS D SD |
| 9. I can assist the person to think through alternatives. | SA A NS D SD |
| 10. I can assist the person to identify some goals. | SA A NS D SD |
| 11. I know how to refer someone for help when appropriate. | SA A NS D SD |

Figure 4

Self-Appraisal Inventory

Instructions:

For each of the statements below, check the place on the scale which best describes your appraisal of the matter. (SA Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. I have the ability to listen to others. | SA A NS D SD |
| 2. I feel comfortable sharing my ideas and feelings with others. | SA A NS D SD |
| 3. I have some understanding of why I do the things I do. | SA A NS D SD |
| 4. I am tolerant of others. | SA A NS D SD |
| 5. I am curious about what others think and feel. | SA A NS D SD |
| 6. It is easy for me to be accepting of others' behavior. | SA A NS D SD |
| 7. I trust most people. | SA A NS D SD |
| 8. I have an ability to influence others. | SA A NS D SD |
| 9. I get along well with my peers. | SA A NS D SD |
| 10. I have a clear idea of my goals in life. | SA A NS D SD |
| 11. I know what I value and believe to be true. | SA A NS D SD |
| 12. I work well alone and independent of others when I need to. | SA A NS D SD |
| 13. I can keep a secret. | SA A NS D SD |
| 14. I am able to assume responsibilities and follow things through. | SA A NS D SD |
| 15. I enjoy solving problems. | SA A NS D SD |
| 16. I can accept criticism from others. | SA A NS D SD |

17. I care about my appearance.	SA A NS D SD
18. I am curious about what others think of me.	SA A NS D SD
19. I am a leader.	SA A NS D SD
20. I am optimistic about my future.	SA A NS D SD
21. I relate well with adults.	SA A NS D SD
22. I am happy with my appearance.	SA A NS D SD
23. Physical fitness is important to me.	SA A NS D SD
24. I believe we can someday have a drug-free school and society.	SA A NS D SD
25. I think cultural differences are to be valued and cherished.	SA A NS D SD
26. What I think, feel, and do can make a positive difference.	SA A NS D SD
27. I am not afraid to take a stand about what I believe.	SA A NS D SD
28. It is important to facilitate others to share their ideas.	SA A NS D SD
29. Students can learn to facilitate adults as well as students.	SA A NS D SD
30. Being a peer facilitator means being an open learner.	SA A NS D SD



5

Implementing Peer Helper Projects

After your students have completed the first seven chapters of the student book, *Helping Skills for Middle School Students*, they will be ready for projects. Training activities can increase students' understanding of themselves and others. However, training takes on a new meaning and is cemented when it is put to use in peer helper projects.

Projects Defined

While self-development and personal growth often result from training, the major purpose of having organized peer facilitator programs is to create additional helping resources. Peer training is more than providing a personal growth and support group for the peers themselves. Rather, peer helpers are trained to be facilitators—to be leaders—and to be of assistance to others.

Peer helpers spontaneously use their skills wherever they can. They are encouraged to use their training and experience in their daily lives, especially at timely moments. However, organized projects can provide a vehicle through which the impact of a program can be increased.

Myrick and Bowman (1981) helped define peer helper projects and described how they can be geared to skill level.

Projects are field experiences with planned procedures. They have defined roles, objectives, plans of action, and provisions for supervision and assessment. They are usually designed for a particular group or population. They are often planned in sequential steps, taking student skills into consideration. Most have a time-line around which events or activities are scheduled (p. 168).

Projects often evolve from a needs assessment, such as a survey of the interests, concerns, and needs of the students. They can be suggested by adults or young people in the schools or communities. They can be problem-focused, where the tasks are to help resolve a conflict or problem situation. They can be preventive in nature, where the focus is on preventing something from occurring, such as alcohol and drug abuse or school failure. Or, they can be developmental, where the task is to enhance personal, social, and academic growth or perhaps to develop certain skills.



Levels of projects

Some projects are simple and easy to implement. They may even be incorporated into the training program as students move toward a higher skill level. For instance, after students have studied the feedback model and practiced the three steps of giving someone a compliment, a project or assignment might be constructed. Peers can find students in school who are making it a better place to be and give those persons feedback. This project is focused and limited in scope. It is appropriate for a particular point in training. It provides an opportunity to practice a skill outside the class and to talk about it before moving on to additional training.

Programs and projects can be classified into three levels based on the breadth of the training: beginning, intermediate, and advanced. In general, the level of the program is related to the helping skills and self-confidence which the students have acquired in their training. In most cases this is further related to the scope of the training program, such as whether it is a class, a club, or a project-focused training group.

Project-centered training

In a *project-centered* training program, peer helpers are trained for a definite purpose, such as school orientation day or a one-day career fair in which selected students go through a series of peer-led activities. In such cases, students are taught a few basic ideas and skills, including: a) the conditions of a helping relationship; b) how to be an attentive listener; and, c) how to ask open-ended questions, clarify or summarize ideas, and respond to feelings. These are then cast into the particular tasks and activities of the project.

With limited skills, facilitators will not be able to perform all of the roles and functions which are taught in a more comprehensive program. Project objectives are limited and time is restricted. They are generally more structured, shorter in duration, and more closely supervised. Although some peer facilitators can perform

at very high levels with limited training, beginning students are usually assigned fewer tasks in a project. With more extended training, such as an academic class, students learn more skills and helping strategies.

Moving from beginning to advanced projects, the students progressively assume more responsibility and are prepared to work in all four of the basic roles: student assistant, tutor, special friend, and small group leader. They tend to have more self-confidence and are ready for more challenges.

Many experienced trainers prefer to move their students through beginning projects to more advanced ones. The first projects are more closely supervised and more attention is given to problem moments which can and do arise.

Organized structured activities usually give definition to the project. For instance, a series of four small group sessions led by peer facilitators might be provided to a group of students who are considering the military after graduation from high school. Or, the small group sessions might focus on practicing school success skills.

Choosing a Project

It might be helpful when planning and organizing a project to consider the following components, as suggested by Myrick and Folk (1991):

1. The target population. (Who receives the assistance?)
2. The expected outcomes. (What are the goals?)
3. The peervention. (What is the overall plan?)
4. The roles. (What will the peer facilitators do?)
5. The skills. (What specific skills are needed?)
6. The procedures. (What are the tasks and activities?)
7. The time-lines. (How is the project scheduled—when, where and how long?)
8. The support. (Whose help do you need in planning, supervising, and backing the project?)
9. The logistics. (What items need to be on a checklist in order to start and complete the project?)
10. The evaluation. (How will you assess the outcomes?)

A more complete discussion of peer helper projects has been described by Myrick and Folk (1991). They introduced the term "peervention" to emphasize that peer helpers provide interventions through their work and organized projects. They also provided a list of projects which goes beyond the scope of this manual.

They organized "peerventions" in the areas of school disorientation, career indecision, bodily assault, sex-related problems, family distress, suicide and depression, community unrest, eating disorders, and academic failure. It is not possible here to present all the ones that they suggested or outlined.

Sample Projects

A few examples are presented here to illustrate how peer projects can be tailored for target populations.

Making personal contracts

You can help other students commit to a plan of action by first making a decision and then developing a "personal contract."

The contract is based on a realistic and achievable goal that the person would like to accomplish within the next few weeks or school grading period. The goal may be related to a change in behavior, attitudes, or some other criteria.

Reproduce the following contract and give it to the person you are helping. Help the person think through the area of concern or goal before completing the contract. Then, both of you can sign the contract. In doing so, you agree to support the person in his or her efforts. Think of something that can be done to "celebrate" when the person has accomplished the goal.

Think of a time when you can meet once or more a week while the person is working toward completing the contract. What progress is being made? How can the person tell? What feelings are being experienced?

Figure 5 Personal Contract

I, _____ (name) hereby resolve to achieve
the following:

I will achieve this goal by doing the following:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I plan to achieve this goal by _____ (date), at which
time I will celebrate by:

Person's signature: _____

(date)

Peer Helper's signature: _____

(date)

From Barbie dolls to spaceships

Girls can grow up to take traditional sex-role positions in society or they can explore new life styles and career choices. Peer-led discussion groups help young girls think about their futures, the barriers that are often imposed by society, and ways to breakthrough the "glass ceilings" placed on women in the business world. A series of structured sessions provides a chance to reflect on self-development as rooted in society. The group examines messages that are communicated about gender roles, positive self-identity and assertiveness, the changing roles of women, women in the world of work, pictures over time, and dreams and plans for the future.

Assessing the applicant

Peer helpers can work with students to help them think of how school behaviors are related to job behaviors and what they will be doing someday. For example, someone being helped might complete the following "Job Application Form."

After the person has completed the form, go over the responses and play the role of an employer, asking for clarification and for examples. Ask the person to name three words that teachers would use to describe their impressions of the person, based on what he or she does in class and around school. How is this different from the impressions that an employer might have? If teachers were to write a recommendation for the student, what might they say? What would he or she like the teachers to say? What would have to be done before this could happen?



Figure 6

Job Application Form

1. Name: _____

2. Desired Job: _____

3. Three things that you do well:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. Your strongest school subject: _____

Your weakest school subject: _____

5. How would you describe yourself as a worker compared to others who would like to have this job? _____

6. After two weeks on the job, what three impressions will your employer have of you? _____

Orientation programs and school adjustment

School adjustment can take place faster and easier if there is an organized orientation program to familiarize students with school policies, academic requirements, and general procedures. These programs can be for the entire student body or they can focus on different groups with special needs and interests. They can be informative and also offer understanding and support.

Myrick and Folk (1991) described an orientation program using peer helpers which could be used effectively with students who are new to a school.

Although adults think they have some good suggestions on how to get along with others, too often their suggestions are from their perspectives. Even though well intended, adults may ignore some of the most pressing concerns of students. For example, two counselors and four teachers met with a large group of new students in a cafeteria and talked about the school handbook. They described a typical school day. The students, meanwhile, sat patiently and listened. In a short time they became restless, especially as the presentations moved toward describing required credits, course selections, and discipline procedures. The questions on the students' minds were: Will I be in a class where I know somebody? What if I don't like my teachers? Where do you go if you have a problem? Are the kids going to make fun of me? What's the name of the person sitting over there? How is this school different? Will I like it here? Will I be successful?

Most orientation programs are one-time events, usually at the beginning of the school year or as a part of campus visits in the spring of the year. Some students continue to feel disoriented, confused, or fail to adjust. They need more timely assistance, perhaps from someone their own age who understands what they are experiencing.

Sometimes a peer facilitator is assigned as a "special friend" to a new student. They tour the school, talk about school procedures, make introductions to other students and teachers, and maybe have lunch with them.

In one school, a "support group" of new students met Friday afternoons. This group was led by a school counselor, with the assistance of peer facilitators. Depending on the size of the support group, the peer helpers were assigned to a smaller group (about 3 to 4 new students). They encouraged members to talk about their school experiences: What did you like best about this week at school? What did you like least? What change would need to take place next week in order to make our school better for you?

Next, common themes and central issues were summarized by the peer group leaders in front of the large group. This gave the counselor an opportunity to respond and contribute more information.

School success skills

Some students need to think about and to learn skills related to school success (e.g. study habits or adjusting to teacher expectations). There are students who want to change and to get a fresh start, but they are not sure where to start. They may have inappropriate work habits or attitudes. Some of these students have given up. Some fail because they don't have appropriate skills and have concluded wrongly that they are failing because they aren't smart or cannot learn.

For example, there are many students who need more practice in working with teachers and following their instructions. These students may need help in catching up. They may lack skills in how to listen, to take notes, to organize, and to start their homework. They may be unsure of their assignments. Tutoring from a peer helper can make a difference, especially when high facilitative skills are used in the process.

Student mediators

Peer helpers can be trained in conflict resolution. When a conflict arises on campus—perhaps between two students, or a student and a teacher—these helpers meet with the parties involved and use their facilitative skills to help resolve the problem. Peer helpers might work together as a pair of mediators, supporting one another in their efforts to reduce the conflict. School mediators can also act as an “honor council” to help students solve their problems before they must meet with school authorities in charge of discipline.

Student mentors

Peer helpers can serve as mentors to younger students in the elementary or middle schools. This special friend role can be arranged by a school counselor who is aware of students needing attention and who might benefit from working with an older student.

Peer mentors provides encouragement and support. When the mentors gain the respect and admiration of the younger students, the skills and attitudes modeled will be noticed by those they are mentoring. In pairing up mentors and the younger students, consideration is given to both gender, special interests, and life experiences.

Study packets

Peer facilitators can help develop and assemble study packets which are aimed at improving school achievement among students. The packets can include information on following directions, taking notes, organizing time, test anxiety, and tips for taking examinations. The packets provide a vehicle for the peers to lead group discussion about selected topics.

Partners against scapegoating

Peer helpers can organize skits and role-playing situations which demonstrate the adverse effects of verbal assaults, degradation, and putdowns. This might focus on cultural differences. Role playing can feature a student who started a fight when he was teased about his performance on a test and cutting remarks were made about his heritage. The peer helpers can present the skits to classes, encouraging class members to identify feelings, related behaviors, and alternatives.

Bilingual helpers

Bilingual peer facilitators can be given partners who are limited in their English speaking skills. They then choose a book and take turns reading pages. For instance, Hispanic bilingual peer helpers can be matched with at-risk Hispanic students who are having academic problems. The peer facilitators can lead a four-session study group which focuses on school success skills. Facilitators also should arrange for individual interviews, when there is more opportunities to discuss specific problems related to school. In addition, the facilitators can work with their special friend's teachers to help translate and to assist in the student's adjustment.

Stress reduction signals

Peer facilitators can help students identify school or family events which tend to produce distress. Discussion focuses on how a person can learn to control stress level. Relaxation techniques can be taught and practiced. For instance, "Sit quietly and comfortably with your eyes closed. Each time you exhale, repeat in your mind the word "relax." Don't say it out loud. Imagine an orange under the heel of your shoe and slowly push on the orange." Ways to cope with stress are visualized and cue words are developed which are designed to signal a person to relax.

School attendance support groups

One project might involve students who seem to have poor academic records because of frequent truanancies or absences. A list of possible candidates can be obtained from the guidance office. These students might take part in some organized group discussions, perhaps co-led by peer facilitators and a school counselor. Discussions can center on peer relationships, future goals, and problems with families or teachers. This support and personal growth group involves confrontation but focuses on problem solving.

Let's write a letter

A group of middle school peers can take time to write "thank you notes" to: 1) parent volunteers; 2) political leaders who support programs for children and schools; 3) supportive businesses in the community who provide services or materials to the school; 4) senior citizens who appreciate a cheerful note; 5) teachers and secretaries who enjoy knowing their special efforts are noticed; 6) and military service men and women from the community who are away on duty.

Deer Peer

"Deer Peer" is a column in the school newspaper that is written by peer helpers. Based on experiences with students and their knowledge of the student body's interests and needs, the column follows a "Dear Abby" format in which typical items are addressed by a panel of peer helpers. The question is posed, the panel reacts with their ideas and opinions, and then a team of peers edits the results for the column. The column lets students know that problems are a part of growing up and that there are people to whom students can turn for help.

Rumors

One middle school group produced a video tape entitled "Rumors." It featured a dramatic presentation where students started gossip which led to unhappy consequences. Three discussion questions were posed at the end of the tape: To what extent is gossiping a problem in the middle school? What often keeps rumors or gossip growing? What might be done when you hear people begin to gossip about others?"

Taking care of the community and the environment

One group of middle school students asked how they could take part in environmental programs, including an "adopt a manatee" project. Some volunteered to work with the humane society, while others took on projects related to Habitat for Humanity and students who were homeless. Some helped organize a group of students who planted trees, while other helped advertise a recycling program.

Student developed projects

The preceding projects are only a few examples of what might be done. These, and others not listed (e.g. See Myrick & Folk, 1991), can be modified to address the needs in a particular school or community. The peer facilitators themselves are the best sources for developing and designing new projects. They can help identify needs and interests. They can take an active part in creating and organizing projects. They frequently think of how best to reach the student populations which have stymied adults. This is a leadership program and peer facilitators can lead us to find ways to help others.





6

Teaching Others in Peer-Led Learning Centers

Learning centers are places designed so that four or five students can work together to learn a specific concept or skill in a brief period of time (e.g. 10 to 12 minutes). A number of areas are placed around a classroom or in a commons area so students can rotate among the centers. Peer helpers can be utilized to enhance learning by assisting at the various centers. The learning climate is improved because more students are taking an active part in the learning process.

Learning Centers Defined

A learning center is an instructional area where activities and tasks provide students with opportunities to take an active part in learning concepts and skills. A center may be designed to obtain different outcomes:

- To introduce, develop, or reinforce a concept.
- To have some fun.
- To make ideas more concrete rather than abstract.
- To accommodate different learning styles and levels of ability.
- To encourage practice and mastery of a skill.
- To motivate and increase student involvement.
- To encourage cooperative or independent work.
- To individualize and personalize the learning process.
- To provide variety to traditional classroom approaches.
- To provide time and space for sharing ideas and tasks.
- To encourage small group interaction.
- To encourage group participation and cooperation.
- To be a participating member of a team.
- To provide opportunities for self-assessment and discovery.

The centers are generally a part of a curriculum unit and feature activities related to speaking, listening, reading, spelling, and calculating. The activities are fun and interesting. Intellectual mastery and isolated skills and facts take on new meanings through applied learning. Individual tasks, as well as those involving small-group interaction, might be completed at a center.



Kinds of Learning Centers

The list of possible learning centers is endless; however, some might be organized to help diagnose and assess student skills and interests; to introduce concepts and practice skills related to an academic subject; to address the personal interests of students; and to enhance social skills. While a particular topic, such as the value and development of drug-free schools and communities, can be integrated or fused into all of these, some learning centers might be developed specifically to focus on prevention education such as drug and alcohol use.

For example, some centers will feature exams, checklists, surveys, self-assessment instruments, anecdotal records and student folders, and other record keeping measures. These allow students to inventory their knowledge, skills, and progress. Because the emphasis is on more individual participation, one might also find learning packages, student presentations, self-instruction activities, computer assisted instruction, and audio or video tapes with headphones. Personal interest centers highlight hobbies, games, arts, and crafts. In some cases, the center might provide demonstrations or students modeling a skill.

Other centers might give attention to guidance and counseling needs, especially those of a developmental nature. For instance, students might engage in career exploration and goal-setting activities. They could complete inventories and participate in decision-making tasks.

Space and Material Requirements

The centers take advantage of the space that is available in a room, although it is possible to set up several centers in a vacant area in the school that happens to be available for a period of time. When selecting furniture, some common objects are: cardboard boxes, refrigerator crates, tables, movable desks and bulletin boards, rocking chairs, bean bag chairs, and benches.

Some of the materials or things that might be used at a center include: art supplies, musical instruments, community specialists (people), pictures, slide projectors, board games, maps and globes, cassette recorders, laminated posters, VCRs, filmstrips, headphones, and computers. Learning centers also might feature things that students have brought to school.

Roles and Functions

The teacher

Teachers identify various units that lend themselves to learning centers. Teachers provide the academic content and objectives, key questions, and activities. The peer helpers can also think of activities, help design centers, and outline general procedures.

Middle schools with Teacher-Advisor Programs (TAP) may find that this period of time lends itself to developing and implementing learning centers. TAP groups that meet about 25 to 30 minutes every day provide a regularly scheduled time within which peers can meet students individually and in groups. Or, the peer helpers might organize some centers and invite various target groups, or a whole TAP group, to go through the center.

The trainer

The trainer will train the peer helpers and identify with them the procedures that will take place at each learning center. Working cooperatively with teachers and teacher-advisor coordinators, the trainer can help supervise the building of the center and the development of the activities and procedures.

The peer helpers

Peer helpers facilitate the tasks at the learning center. They may have before them a card that lists their duties or what they are to say at certain points. They give introductory remarks and explain the procedures to those visiting the center. They get the group started and give time signals. They may be assigned to coach, demonstrate, review, or clarify ideas. They attend to questions, referring the student to the teacher when appropriate or necessary. They use high facilitative responses to help students feel successful.

The peers first learn the concepts and skills themselves. They may then want to design a center or be instructed in how to proceed with one that is already developed. They manage and demonstrate the use of equipment, complete assignment checklists, and consult with the teacher about student concerns, progress, or behavior. Finally, they read or say aloud any summary statements and bring closure to the activities.

In some cases peers may write a summary report of student or group progress at a center, or follow-up with individuals. Based on their experiences, the peers help redesign or improve on other learning centers.

In Table 3 you will find a list of learning centers that focuses on school curriculum in elementary or middle schools. The activities and tasks around each of the centers would need to be specified.

Table 3

Some Possible Peer-Led Learning Centers

Science learning centers

Temperature takers and plotters.

What will float?

The metric system.

Environmental crisis—Ecosystem.

Magnifying glasses.

Liquids and solids.

Magnets—What will they pick up?

Leaf Fun—(e.g. Kinds of tree leaves; mimeographed sheet of scrambled letters which spell plant words; matching leaves with pictures of trees; pretend to be a tree—Write or tell a story about the tree; what kind of tree are you?)

Math learning centers

First and ten—(e.g. Play a football game—adding and subtracting scores, moving the ball down the field based on correct answers.)

Flash cards.

Going to the moon (e.g. Add numbers, multiply, and so forth to move the rocket to the pad and off to the moon.)

Shape-O—(e.g. Name shapes; use shapes to make pictures. If you were a shape, what would you be?)

The money game—Name coins; add and subtract games.

Social studies learning centers

Geography games and riddles.

The worry bead corner—Write what you worry about.

True or false—Moving a piece to a goal along a game board.

Map study—Find the countries, rivers, and so forth.

States jigsaw puzzle—Timed game between teams or groups.

Taking a trip—Sights to see, routes, cities, products.

Yesterday and today—A "guess who" game with clues.

Substance abuse—Matching information and consequences.

Social skills—What would you do if....

English learning centers

The prefix wheel (e.g. Common prefixes (or root wheel; suffix wheel) are put on a wheel which students dial and then make a word. The words are recorded.

The dictionary game—Limited time to look up words.

Make a story—Use story lines and lead-ins, or words from a word list; work a particular sentence into a story.

Listen to sounds or look at a picture and make a story, or tape record a story. The peer helper types the story as it is told or perhaps the ending of a story.

Create a mystery, perhaps with a tape of mystery sounds.

Examine objects and then make a story.

Make a classroom newspaper; create some headlines.

Draw cartoons or make up captions to funny pictures.

Listen to a tape; list the facts and identify the opinions.



7

Preventing Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Schools are searching for effective ways of reducing alcohol and drug abuse among their students. Peer projects can focus on these areas. Peer helpers can assist with prevention education projects by working with other students, especially those students who are at risk.

Defining the Problem

The following is excerpted from a chapter in *Peervention* (Myrick & Folk, 1991). It was written for peer facilitators.

The abuse of alcohol and drugs is a continuing problem which threatens our society. One alarming fact is that experimentation with alcohol and drugs is starting at an earlier age than in the preceding decades. The first experience with marijuana, for example, is about 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ years of age and for alcohol it is even younger. Four out of ten sixth graders say there is pressure from other students to use alcohol and about 35% of fourth graders believe drinking is "a big problem" for their age group.

There is evidence that the earlier in life that a person starts to drink alcohol, the more likely that there will be alcohol-related problems later in life. Preventing the use of alcohol and other drug use when people are young increases the probability that they will have drug-free and healthy lives in their later years (Gonzalez, 1989).

Millions of dollars have been poured into the war against drugs and there is a public trend away from using illicit drugs. It is encouraging that a more educated generation of young people is saying no to drugs and deciding to work for drug-free schools and a drug-free society.

Yet, some illicit drugs have become cheaper to buy on the street and are still a part of almost every community. The number of people using the highly addictive form of the drug known as crack has increased as much as 33% within the last five years. The war against drugs has only begun.

In many respects, it will not be the older generations who will lead the battles and win the war. Old habits are hard to break and casual attitudes about alcohol and drug usage have been part of older Americans' thinking for many years. It is the new generations of young people where the best hope lies. This is one of the reasons why peer facilitators volunteer to work with elementary school students, helping them to learn how to resist pressures and to make healthier choices. In doing so, most peer helpers have increased their own awareness and, subsequently, reaffirmed their decisions to say no to drugs.

The Gateway Drugs

Each year over 390,000 Americans die prematurely from the effects of smoking cigarettes. Cigarette smokers have a 70% greater chance of early death than nonsmokers. The habit causes 85% of all lung cancer deaths, 30 to 40% of heart and blood vessel disease, and 80 to 90% of pulmonary disease.

On the bright side, more people are making an educated decision not to smoke. About 29% of adults now smoke cigarettes, down from 40% about 25 years ago. Legislative efforts have resulted in smoking being restricted in many public places. Nonsmokers are beginning to realize the ill effects of being around smokers and inhaling secondary smoke.

Fewer teenagers are smoking and the nonsmoker rate has stabilized within the past few years, but there are still far too many smokers. The more years of school people have, the less likely they are to smoke. The Surgeon General's goal is to have a smoke-free society by the year 2000.

Alcohol (beer, wine, wine coolers, liquor) is America's preferred substance to abuse. Alcoholic beverages as an industry grosses over 12 billion dollars in sales each year. In a statistical sense, teenagers drink alcohol as much as adults, with one out of 20 high school seniors drinking every day. With so much attention focused on the "drug problem" as related to marijuana, cocaine, crack, and other drugs, not as much attention has been given to the most serious problem—teenage use of alcohol.

Most young people first get drunk on beer or wine. It is what they can afford. These beverages are just as intoxicating as liquor or "the hard stuff." In 1987 a *Weekly Reader* survey found that four out of ten sixth graders reported feeling peer pressure to use alcohol. Among teenagers there is a growing concern related to binge drinking, which involves several drinks at a time. It demonstrates a lack of knowledge about alcohol.

Cigarettes and alcohol are considered "gateway drugs" because they pave the way for the use of other drugs and substances. This is where teenagers typically start. While there are exceptions, most people who use hard drugs have progressed through various stages of using the gateway drugs.

The Illegal Drugs

Marijuana (also called pot, grass, weed, reefer, herb, or smoke) was once thought to be a rather harmless mind-altering drug. It is now known that it is a complex drug, containing 426 chemicals that when smoked convert into 2,000. Today's marijuana joint is much more powerful than the ones smoked during the 1960s when it was a popular drug of choice among young people.

With increased drug testing in work places, those who smoke marijuana may be threatened with the loss of their jobs. First, it takes the body as long as 30 days to rid itself of the THC, the primary ingredient, which accumulates in the body's fatty tissues such as the liver, ovaries, testicles, and, of course, the brain. Habitual use destroys brain cells and harms short term memory. Continued use also leads to lethargy, poor attention span, neglect of personal appearance, and a general lack of anything except the thought of getting high. Habitual users have been described as "burnouts," seeming to be slow, dim witted, and forgetful. Although it may not cause mental disorders, the drug is likely to heighten existing psychological problems.

Another important fact is that marijuana also diminishes the body's ability to protect itself against illness by reducing the division of disease-repelling white blood cells. A regular smoker is more likely to get sick. There is also some evidence that boys who use marijuana before puberty may have less-than-normal sexual development as a result of lowered testosterone, the principal male hormone. The drug has been shown to disrupt the menstrual cycle in adolescent girls.

Cocaine, also called coke or snow, has been made glamorous by the media within recent years, showing it as a way to chase the blues away and providing a rush of excitement. However, these effects wear off quickly and a psychological crash occurs. What follows is depression, anxiety, irritability, and lack of motivation. The solution too often is to get more coke and the abuser is on a roller coaster ride, with each subsequent "downer" becoming

more intense and creating a greater craving for the drug. A self-destructive cycle is set in motion. And worse, the horrendous ride continues as there is a false sense of well being and security, tricking users into thinking that they are in control and cannot overdose.

According to a Cocaine Hotline study, the average teenager progresses from first use to chronic abuse in just fifteen and a half months, as compared to four years for adults. The drug can quickly become an obsession.

In one experiment, monkeys were given choices of food, water, enjoyable activities, and various drugs, including cocaine. All selected cocaine as their first choice, which they continued to inject until they went into convulsions and died. Such extreme cravings were not found with any other substance.

Crack (base, rock, or crank) is a freebase variant made by mixing cocaine crystals with baking soda. A paste is created which after it hardens is cut into chips. It is then smoked. The name crack comes from the crackling sound the drug makes when ignited. It has been called the "fast food of drugs" because chips are sold for as little as five dollars, putting it within reach of many young people. There is an intense high, multiplying the effect of cocaine five to ten times. Many people lose control and become violent or suicidal. It may be the most addictive substance known to man and the most destructive.

A research study released in 1990 by the National Institute on Drug Abuse showed that more than a quarter of a million American teenagers (262,000), most of them boys, have used potentially harmful performance-enhancing anabolic steroids. This number may be conservative because it did not take into account school dropouts or those who would not admit to usage. The number seems to be increasing, especially since they have been linked to world class athletes to increase muscle mass and strength. In

addition, parents, coaches, and others indirectly encourage the use of such drugs by putting pressure on young people to compete and win. More than half of the users surveyed (55%) believed that their parents probably knew about it.

At a time when most teenagers are struggling to accept their bodies and are worried about appearances, the secret drug can be appealing. It is viewed as a short cut or a quick fix in an attempt to gain strength. Yet, there are many health problems related to steroid use, including: sterility, increased cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, liver damage, increased irritability, and even violent behavior. An educational campaign needs to be aimed especially at young athletes.



Peer Facilitators Can Help

Nancy Tobler reported a meta-analysis of 143 adolescent drug prevention programs in the *Journal of Drug Issues* (1986). Her study compared the results achieved with program participants in control or comparison groups. She concluded, "It was clear that peer programs are dramatically more effective than all other interventions" in the prevention of alcohol and other drug use.

The prevention of alcohol and other drug use is a high priority among peer facilitators. It has particular relevance to minority populations which are at risk.

Peer helpers may be able to help their classmates by being aware of the stages of behavioral change which suggest that a person is having problems with alcohol or drugs. They may need to use the problem-solving model or confrontation to bring matters to a head, but their timely assistance may also save lives. As facilitators, peer helpers can also take active roles in prevention education projects.

It has been estimated that 30 million American children live in alcoholic families. Many of these children will become addicted too, as they continue a family tradition. They will become tomorrow's alcoholics unless they have an opportunity to talk about their situations, examine the values that they want to live by, and to be supported in their efforts to break the family pattern. Support groups, both in and out of school, can be co-led by peer facilitators.

Some peer facilitators have been key leaders in helping form "Just Say No" clubs. There are now over 15,000 nationally affiliated clubs. They meet in schools, churches and synagogues, and in community centers and agencies. Saying "no" during adolescence is a critical factor for being able to resist drugs later in life.

Although most schools have some kind of anti-drug and anti-alcohol program, one study of teenagers estimated that nearly two-thirds of high school seniors use alcohol, 29% smoke cigarettes, and 18% use marijuana on a regular basis. One of two high school students will try an illicit drug before graduation, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Peers can put together a multimedia presentation related to your school and community. They can sponsor projects which feature learning activities, bulletin boards, and posters. Video taped productions might also encourage students to take a stand against alcohol and drugs.

The following projects might also help prevent the prevention of alcohol and other drug use.

Let's talk alternatives

Small group discussions among adolescents can suggest alternatives to using alcohol and drugs. Peer helpers can lead discussion topics: avoiding stress, knowing criminal laws about alcohol, a quiz about gateway drugs or driving under the influence of alcohol, refusal skills, symptoms of alcohol dependence, and where people can go for help.

Smoke free world

A group of peer facilitators in Orlando, Florida, developed a four-day unit on the prevention of cigarette smoking, a gateway drug, for elementary school age students. It was coordinated with special efforts made by the American Lung Association who provided pamphlets, video tapes, slides, artificial lungs for demonstrations, and other materials. Student knowledge and attitudes were assessed.

Be smart, don't start

This prevention education program, featuring the spokes-dog McGruff, is aimed at eight to twelve-year-olds and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Middle school peer helpers can use the trench-coated puppet to encourage students to discuss and follow the motto: Winners Don't Use and Users Don't Win.

Let's talk baby talk

Teenagers like to talk. Peer leadership can be used with pregnant/parenting teens (both male and female). After training, peer helpers participate on panels and present information, as well as experiences and attitudes, to adult community groups to raise awareness and support. They can also present programs to youth groups to help prevent teen pregnancy. Training is project-specific, with emphasis on what makes a panel function well and on cultural differences.

Stay smart, don't start

The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information offers free posters, stickers, and guides which can be used in projects. Programs and materials have also been published in Spanish. Call NCADI at 1 (800) SAY NO-TO for more information.

8

Networking

One way to share ideas and to learn from other peer trainers is to participate in some type of networking process. Being a member of the National Peer Helpers Association would help you learn more about some of the efforts that are taking place in the nation. *The Peer Facilitator Quarterly*, the official publication of the National Peer Helpers Association, frequently describes programs in action, highlighting their training efforts and projects. Some articles give you additional hints about building your program. The National Peer Helpers Association holds a national conference annually which provides an excellent opportunity for personal interaction with other trainers from throughout the nation.

Some state organizations also are being formed. These organizations hold conferences and publish newsletters to allow for the sharing of ideas. Networking also can be done with other trainers in your area—sharing your mutual enthusiasm and interest in peer helping.

The Peer Assistance Network of Texas is an outstanding effort to promote networking among peer helpers and trainers in Texas. Supported by the Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, this organization provides support through a newsletter and by sponsoring state conferences. The second annual PAN-Texas Middle School Conference was held in the fall of 1991 with over 600 attending.

During the first year, the Texas conference focused on skills training and workshops. During the second year they gave special attention to building a sense of commitment and common purpose among peer helpers throughout the state. The general format provided participants with an opportunity to meet in groups of 10 to 15 students each and were facilitated by high school peer helpers. They also made an effort to provide two tracks, one for adults and one for students, giving the older participants a chance to talk about program problems and successes, standards, and administrative issues and concerns.

The California Association of Peer Programs held its first middle school peer helping conference in the spring of 1992 in San Jose, California. Middle school peer helpers previously had been included with high school peer helpers in the largest annual state conference in the nation.

Some school districts in other states have organized similar conferences, but on district or regional scales. In southwest Florida, for instance, several school districts sent representatives to a regional conference where training of trainers was provided. Experienced trainers attended to share their ideas and to meet with others who had already started programs. First year trainers asked questions and received information which helped them start their programs. Both beginning and experienced trainers expressed the need and interest to continue sharing ideas and support for each other.

State peer helping associations and the National Peer Helpers Association provide excellent ways to network with others and to share ideas for training and projects. Your colleagues will welcome your membership and participation.

The key to any program is you—the trainer—who selects trainees and projects. The key to a trainer's success is the careful selection of trainees, a structured curriculum, and close support groups. Every program is different; yet, there are some common features which often predict favorable program outcomes. Networking on a state or national level provides opportunities for trainers to stay current professionally and to support others who are engaged in the important work of peer helping.



9

Evaluating Peer Helper Programs

Trainers and project coordinators want to be accountable. Evaluation of desired outcomes can provide evidence that supports the program and suggests new directions. Without feedback, there is no way to judge program effectiveness.

In their newsletter, the Peer Assistance Network of Texas cited a state survey (1991) which found peer assistance programs to be "efficient and cost-effective in reaching at-risk students."

The survey, completed by 33 school districts, was conducted by an independent, nonprofit organization founded by the business community. Preliminary findings suggested that peer programs at middle and high schools were extremely promising as a strategy in student retention programs. The survey also showed that peer coordinators/trainers wanted more time to spend in their programs and that 44% of the districts expected to expand peer helping services in the future.

The same survey showed that peer helper training and projects were closely tied with various school programs and services: 93% with substance abuse prevention; 93% with school guidance services; 82% with dropout prevention; 86% with tutoring services; and 61% with handicapped or special education. This is not too surprising, considering both funding and school personnel are available to coordinate such programs.

Another interesting finding was the degree to which parents were involved and supported the program. About 70% of the school districts reported some form of parent involvement, including transportation, fund-raising, luncheons or banquets, and participation on advisory boards.

Accountability

Evaluation procedures should be included in a program from the beginning. Rigorous research methods and instruments may not always be used. The measurement devices, however, should be carefully constructed with sound rationale and have both face validity and reliability. Following are some suggestions for some easily implemented accountability approaches.

The narrative approach

Perhaps the most common approach used in educational institutions and community agencies is the narrative approach. It is an attempt to describe a program and its purpose and goals. For the most part, this approach relies on the general validation that something did occur. It is the opinion of the trainer, peers, or outside observers, for instance, that training did take place and that services were offered.

A list of program objectives might be reviewed by the trainer and the peer helpers. The extent to which objectives were met could be reported through general judgments, observations, or opinions that might be collected. Sometimes a simple "yes" or "no" checklist is provided and the respondents indicate their perceptions. Or, efforts might be made to tally the particulars of a program, such as the number of peer helpers, the number of people seen by peer helpers, or more specifically, the number of students who received tutoring or who were seen in a group discussion by peer helpers. Categorizing interventions and recording how often they took place can provide numerical data that can be used to describe program outcomes.

One such form is provided in Figure 7, a checklist for trainers. Trainers respond by checking those that they either can or cannot do, taking note of those that need improvement. How are you doing at this point? How would you rate yourself on these items? The yes-no format could easily be changed to show your degree of agreement with each item (e.g. Strongly Agree; Agree, Not Sure; Disagree; or Strongly Disagree) and this could be computed into a numerical score, perhaps arranged from 1 to 5.

Figure 7 Assessment of Trainer Knowledge and Skills

Directions:

The following are desired learning outcomes for a trainer of peer facilitators or helpers. Check yourself against the list and give attention to those where you are uncertain or less sure.

As a trainer/coordinator, I am able to:

Yes No

- ☐ ☐ Describe the value, need, and purpose of a peer helper program.
- ☐ ☐ Describe four peer helper roles.
- ☐ ☐ Explain and give examples of how peer helper projects are related to the peer helper roles.
- ☐ ☐ List and describe five helping or facilitative conditions that peers create in their helping relationships.
- ☐ ☐ List and describe six basic high facilitative responses.
- ☐ ☐ List four steps of a basic problem-solving model that can be used by peer helpers.
- ☐ ☐ List and describe the important factors to consider when organizing a peer helper project.
- ☐ ☐ Cite and outline the steps or procedures in selecting students for a peer helper training program.
- ☐ ☐ Cite at least three examples of peer helper projects that might take place in school or at another site.

Yes No

- ☐ ☐ Give a 6- to 10-minute speech or presentation about peer helper programs, attending to need, roles, and examples of projects and desired outcomes.
- ☐ ☐ Name three people in my school or community who understand what my program is and support my efforts.
- ☐ ☐ Describe at least two procedures that I can use to help evaluate a peer helper project or program.
- ☐ ☐ Identify three strengths to draw upon and two obstacles to overcome that will help me to implement a peer helper program or make one better.
- ☐ ☐ Identify at least two personal benefits that I have gained or hope to gain from my work with peer helpers and/or my program.

Likewise, students might be asked for similar information. They might respond to these items and/or additional ones that would provide data about the program. Others who have observed the workings of the program might be asked for their opinions by checking agreement or disagreement with a few items.

While it is important to be able to describe a program and tell what trainers and peer helpers have done, most people are more intrigued with the question: And, as a result of the program, what has been accomplished? Or, What difference did it make to have peer helpers work with others?

To answer these questions, other accountability approaches must be used.

The pre-post approach

This method attempts to measure the changes that might be attributed to a training program or a peer helper project. For instance, changes in peer helper knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and attitude might be examined. The questions to be answered: What impact has the training program and participation in projects had on the peer helpers? From what point did the peers start and where are they at this point in time?

Sometimes a retrospective measurement (e.g. Myrick, 1990) might be used. In this case, the peers think back to a point in time, perhaps when they started the training program, and mark a response (using a circle) on an item that would indicate their perceived skills, attitudes, knowledge, self-confidence, and so forth. A five-point scale might be used to indicate their agreement with an item. Then, they answer the same item again by placing another mark (using an X) which might indicate where they are now. A comparison of the marks on an item can give some indication as to the gains or losses made by a student or a group.

Similarly, this approach might also be used with those who received the services of peer helpers. Those who worked with peer helpers, including students and teachers, might be asked to record their perceptions to items on a written inventory. In this case, the respondents are sharing their impressions of any gains or ones that they have observed in others.

The control group approach

The control group method enables you to compare the differences between those who participated in the program and those who did not, or those who received the services of the peer helpers and those who did not. The comparison group may be drawn at random or matched by some variable (e.g. all students who were failing a course; all students who requested tutoring in math by peer helpers).

The instruments used to collect data or information may be the same as those used in the pre-post approach. Similar procedures may be used with either the peer helpers themselves or those with whom they worked. The primary consideration is finding a comparison group who would not receive training or services, but would complete the same measuring instruments for comparison purposes.

Testimonials

In this approach, an attempt is made to construct a case study through testimonials or statements. This might take the form of an interview or perhaps a written response to open-ended questions such as:

- What did you like best about the training (or, working with your peer helper)?
- What did you like least?
- Would you recommend a similar experience for others?
- How would you describe the program (or, your work with the peer helper)?
- What benefit, if any, have you gained?
- What changes would you recommend?

The anonymous responses to these and other questions can then be tallied as positive or negative and, with proper editing to protect the welfare of a student, quotations can be used to illustrate both process and outcomes. One example of an instrument that might be used in these accountability approaches is provided in Figure 8. Respondents can use a simple checklist or a rating scale to react to a list of items developed by the peers as they see them related to specific helping projects.



Figure 8 Peer Helper Rating Scale

Directions:

Please read each of the statements below. They are about your work with a peer helper or facilitator. Show your agreement or disagreement with each one by circling the letters to the right: SA: Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Unsure; D = Disagree; SD; Strongly Disagree.

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Working with the peer facilitator was helpful. | SA A U D SD |
| 2. He/she listened to me. | SA A U D SD |
| 3. We talked about my interests and concerns. | SA A U D SD |
| 4. Sometimes he/she said things that hurt my feelings. | SA A U D SD |
| 5. I was treated as a friend. | SA A U D SD |
| 6. I have a better attitude about school because of our work together. | SA A U D SD |
| 7. I liked meeting with the peer helper. | SA A U D SD |
| 8. The peer helper was "bossy" and told me what to do. | SA A U D SD |
| 9. I would recommend a similar experience to other students. | SA A U D SD |
| 10. I would like to learn how to be a peer helper someday. | SA A U D SD |

What I liked best about meeting with the peer helper was....

What I liked least was....

Other comments:

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The effects of a program on the climate of the school can also be measured by using data that is already being collected by other school personnel, such as daily attendance records, grades, citizenship marks, achievement tests, homework assignments completed, discipline referrals, and so on. Readily available data such as the number of students and teachers who are assisted by peers, the number of students participating in a peer helper project, or informal interviews with students, teachers, and administrators can be useful.

Nobody is quite sure why people tend to resist being accountable or why accountability studies are often an after-thought. Data can be collected, analyzed, and studied, and then used to make decisions. It need not be shared publicly, unless the trainer and peers believe that a report might be used as part of public relations. Most trainers, however, want to communicate their findings to all those involved in and affected by the program or a particular project. Regardless, for best results, accountability procedures should be planned in advance and the collection of baseline data should always be a consideration.

Trainer and Peer Helper Assessment

Perhaps nobody will know as much about the program's success as the trainer/coordinator. You will have observed the personal growth of the peer helpers themselves as they study the materials and practice the skills. As they put their skills into practice, you will experience the satisfaction of helping others through the various projects. It is an exciting process and most trainers report that they look forward to working with their peer group more than any other part of their work schedule.

During supervision, as the peers discuss their work, you will be able to take note of what is being achieved. Watching students grow and seeing the impact that they have on others are among the most rewarding aspects of being a peer trainer. However, the final evaluation of the program would be remiss if it did not take into account your own personal and professional growth.

As the year draws to an end, you will want to take stock of what you and your peer helpers have accomplished. It will be a time for celebration as well as looking for ways to improve the program in the future. You and your peers might share your responses to the questions presented in Figure 9.

Most peer helper trainers report that working with their students—training them, coaching them, and sharing joys and frustrations—is a positive experience. It is exciting and fun. And, the pleasant memories will last for a lifetime.

Figure 9

Trainer's Evaluation Activity

Directions:

Use a symbol or phrase as you complete the following. This activity can also be used with students as the trainer/coordinator moves toward closure at the end of the school year.

Identify:

1. A change that would make your program even better than it is. _____
2. A positive experience you had with your peer facilitators. _____
3. One thing you accomplished for which you are satisfied. _____
4. A favorite training activity. _____
5. A student population that could benefit from peer helpers. _____
6. A favorite project. _____
7. A barrier that has to be overcome to make things better. _____
8. An unpleasant experience that happened. _____
9. A person who is supportive—how do you know? _____
10. One suggestion for a beginning trainer or a beginning peer helper. _____
11. Something you would do if you were to start again. _____
12. One thing you have learned about yourself as a result of being a trainer. _____

Appendix A

The American School Counselor Association Position Statement on Peer Facilitator Programs

(Adopted 1978; Revised 1984)

It is the position of the American School Counselor Association that peer facilitating programs enhance the effectiveness of the counseling program by increasing outreach programs and expanding guidance services. Through proper selection, training, and supervision, peer facilitating can be a positive force within the school and community that will meet the need of a sizeable segment of the student body.

Students often communicate their problems to their peers rather than to parents, administrators, or counselors. There exists in every school community a segment of the student population that rejects adult relationships. In our society peer influence may be the strongest single motivational force in a student's life. Peers can be selected and trained by professional counselors in communication and counseling skills through a carefully planned peer counseling program, and produce additional guidance services which otherwise might never have been realized.

Peer facilitating defined

Peer facilitating is defined as a variety of interpersonal helping behaviors assumed by nonprofessionals who undertake a helping role with others. Peer facilitating includes one-to-one helping relationships, group leadership, discussion leadership, advisement, tutoring, and all activities of an interpersonal helping or assisting nature. A peer facilitator refers to a person who assumes the role of a helping person with contemporaries. The term "peer" denotes a person who shares related values, experiences, life style, and is approximately the same age.

Peer facilitating roles

Peer facilitators can provide a variety of useful and helpful services for schools depending on the individual school's needs. It should be emphasized that because peer facilitators are trained to function in an interpersonal capacity, they should not be used as clerical assistants.

The most obvious role of a peer facilitator is that of one-to-one assistance. Some types of assistance given by peer facilitators on a one-to-one basis are:

- Talking with students about their personal problems.
- Referring peers to other sources of help in the community.
- Providing information with regard to vocational options.
- Helping students with their school problems.

Peer facilitators can be effective in group settings. Their training enables them to be used as group leaders, assistants in counseling groups, teachers of counseling skills to other groups, or as communication skills trainers in the classroom period. Peer facilitators can also help to train new groups of peer facilitators.

There are several educational functions that a peer facilitator can perform effectively, such as tutoring students in academic areas, serving as readers for nonreaders and assisting special education consultants in working with learning and behavioral disabled students.

Peer facilitators can be helpful in many guidance capacities. They are very effective in greeting new students and their parents and in making them feel welcome. They can be used to help with the registration process by aiding students in the selection of their classes and serving as assistants and runners on registration nights. Other guidance functions peer facilitators can perform are serving as career center helpers, open house guides, writing organizational details of testing, and being responsible for the management of career program speakers.



Professional counselors' responsibilities in peer facilitating

The professional counselor must accept the responsibility for adequately meeting the needs of the school population and for writing a peer facilitating program designed to meet those needs. The school counselor must then accept the additional responsibilities for:

1. Devising a plan for selection of peer facilitators which is compatible with the population to be served.
2. Coordinating the leadership of an adequate training program for the peer facilitators selected for the program.
3. Planning the professional counselor's time budget so that adequate time is scheduled for work with the peer facilitators.
4. Constructing a support system through positive, factual, and honest public relations.
5. Providing time for meeting with the peer facilitating group on a weekly basis for continued training, supervision, sharing, and personal growth.
6. Continually monitoring and evaluating the training and impact of the program and instituting any necessary changes to help the program meet the assessed needs of the population it serves.

The professional counselor should accept responsibility for the design and completion and research on the program. Follow-up studies must be conducted and program effectiveness must be studied in an effective manner. Results should be reported to the population served and interested professionals; it is the responsibility of the counselor to share information, research, and expertise with other interested counselors.

How peer facilitators help the professional counselor

After training with ongoing supervision, peer facilitators can work as important members of the guidance team. Peer facilitators often are able to help accomplish things the professional cannot do alone or as quickly alone. Therefore, peer facilitators help increase the services of the counseling center. They are able to serve in an outreach function and be of service to any population that may feel uncomfortable talking with the professional counselor.

The peer facilitator may assist peers with a variety of problems as they serve as listeners. While serving as listeners, they are able to help others in a daily basis to stay healthy mentally, or to reduce crisis situations by alerting professional counselors to problems of a serious nature.

As counselors train peer facilitators with helping skills, the peer facilitators grow as persons and become more functional at a higher level. Peer facilitators are also able to see if they want a future occupation in the helping profession. Peer facilitators are trained to become more effective adults.

Well trained peer facilitators can have a positive effect upon students that no one else can provide. Students sometimes relate and accept alternative patterns of behavior from peers who are struggling with similar feelings and problems.



Appendix B

Programmatic Standards

National Peer Helpers Association

(June, 1990)

The National Peer Helpers Association believes the following standards are essential for any quality peer program:

I. Program start-up

- A. Planning: Prior to program implementation, careful planning should be conducted to address such issues as the following:
 - 1. Rationale: There is a clear and compelling rationale for the development of the program; frequently, this is accomplished through conducting a formal or informal needs assessment in the setting in which the program is to be implemented.
 - 2. Purpose: The purpose of the program derives logically from its rationale, and is typically summarized in a formal mission statement.
 - 3. Goals and Objectives: Programmatic goals and objectives are:
 - (a) reflective of the rationale and purpose of the program; and
 - (b) clear, realistic, and achievable.
 - 4. Procedures: The procedures and activities through which programmatic goals are to be accomplished are laid out in clear and systematic fashion.
 - 5. Compliance: The program is planned and implemented in a manner consistent with local, state, and national guidelines for programmatic standards and ethics (see NPHA Code of Ethics for Peer Helpers and Peer Helping Professionals).
- B. Commitment: The program should enjoy not simply the permission, but the active commitment and involvement of those to solicit and maintain its services. Such commitment is reflected particularly in the following areas:
 - 1. Tangible evidence of a high level of administrative, staff, and community support; in many cases, this includes the formation of a program advisory committee. Committee members may or may not be directly involved in program implementation, but they provide valuable input to the program staff, and help to maximize a sense of program ownership.

2. Sufficient financial and logistical support for effective program implementation; such support includes the provision of necessary curricular and training resources.
- C. Staffing: Program staff should possess appropriate background, training, and characteristics to enable them to carry out their responsibilities in an effective manner. Among professional staff who work directly with peer helpers, the following skills are essential:
1. Strong positive rapport with the population from which the peer helpers are selected.
 2. Educational and practical experience that is relevant to the nature and goals of the program.
 3. Understanding of, and commitment to, fundamental principles of peer helping; this includes a readiness to maximize the level of programmatic ownership and involvement on the part of the peer helpers themselves.
 4. Close familiarity with the setting in which the program is to be implemented.
 5. Clear grasp of program needs and goals, and ability to articulate effectively the nature and purpose of the program to peer helpers, other staff, the sponsoring agency, and the broader community.
 6. Recognition of the importance of serving as a positive role model, both personally and professionally.
 7. Familiarity with different learning styles and teaching strategies including both experiential and didactic approaches.
 8. Ability to work effectively with groups.
 9. Mastery of concepts and skills necessary for effective training and supervision of peer helpers.
 10. Sufficient time and energy in order to be able to carry out programmatic responsibilities.
- D. Organizational Structure: The program should be organized and structured in a logical and consistent manner that provides clear lines of authority, responsibility, and communication; and is reflective of the nature and purpose of the program.



II. Program implementation

A. Screening and Selection: The program should employ a clear, systematic, and careful procedure for the screening and selection of peer helpers. Typically, this procedure includes the following:

1. Establishing appropriate criteria as to the characteristics being sought among prospective peer helpers. Among those characteristics are helpfulness, trustworthiness, concern for others, ability to listen, and potential to serve as a positive role model.
2. Conducting a formal or informal survey in the program setting, in order to determine which individuals are felt to possess the desired characteristics.
3. Making application to the program, soliciting recommendations from others in the program setting, and structuring an interview with program staff.

Programs may differ as to whether final selection of peer helpers should occur prior to or after peer helping training. But in either case, the selection process should be guided by the following criteria:

1. Demonstration of appropriate helping characteristics and skills.
 2. Evidence of emotional security.
 3. Understanding of the type(s) of services to be provided.
 4. Commitment to and availability for the provision of those services.
 5. Ability to be reflective of and sensitive to the characteristics of the population to be served.
 6. Manageability of the size of the group selected, in order to ensure quality training and supervision.
- B. Training: Once peer helpers have been selected, they should be provided with quality training in the knowledge and skills they will need to be effective in the peer helping role. The training program that is implemented should be reflective of the nature and goals of the program; should take into account the age, needs and characteristics of the population to be served; should utilize appropriate curricular resources and training strategies; and should be consistent with local, state, and national guidelines on ethics and standards. Trainees should commit to participate in all aspects of training, and to maximize opportunities for both skill development and personal growth. Finally, training should be viewed as an ongoing process, one which is never truly completed.

While specific features of training may vary somewhat from program to program, the following elements are characteristic of effective peer helping training models:

1. Role of the Peer Helper: Training in the peer helping role includes, but may not be limited to, the following:
 - a. Program orientation.
 - b. Characteristics of the helping (caring, acceptance, genuineness, understanding, trustworthiness).
 - c. Self-awareness.
 - d. Positive role modeling; maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
 - e. Avoidance of temptation to offer advice, propose solutions, or impose values.
 - f. Positive listening skills.
 - g. Recognition of limitations.
 - h. Development of individual and group trust.
 - i. Creation of a support system of peer helpers for each other, as well as for helpers.
 - j. Development of code of ethics and standards of behavior.
2. Confidentiality/Liability Issues: While communications between peer helpers and helpees are typically confidential, there are two important exceptions to this general rule:
 - a. Potential threats to the personal safety or well-being of the peer helper, helpee, or others:
 - b. Situations or problems beyond the personal experience level or expertise of the peer helper.

It is an essential component of any peer helping training program that peer helpers know how to recognize such situations, are aware of their limitations and responsibilities, and have ready access to professional staff and appropriate referral resources.

3. Communication Skills
 - a. Basic principles of verbal and of nonverbal communication.
 - b. Active listening skills (attending, empathizing, and so forth)
 - c. Facilitative responding (questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and so forth)

4. Problem-Solving/Decision-Making Strategies: Steps in principled decision-making (identifying the problem; brainstorming alternatives; predicting consequences; carrying out action plan; evaluating results).
5. Additional Issues and Topics: Depending upon the nature and goals of particular programs, additional specialized training may be provided in areas such as the following:
 - a. Basic concepts of human behavior. While not expected to function as amateur therapists, peer helpers should have some degree of familiarity with concepts such as the following: The role of motivational and reinforcement factors in behavior; sociocultural influences and differences; and individual and group dynamics.
 - b. Group facilitation techniques.
 - c. Peer tutoring strategies.
 - d. Crisis management.
 - e. Conflict resolution.
 - f. Special needs populations.
 - g. Telephone "hotline" management.
 - h. Specific problem areas (substance abuse, dropouts, depression and suicide, teen pregnancy, child abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, gangs and cults, family relations, and so forth)
 - i. Knowledge of referral resources, services, and programs.
- C. Service Delivery: Subsequent to training, peer helpers should be provided with structured opportunities to engage in a variety of meaningful, productive helping roles within the program setting. The peer helping services which are provided should:
 1. Be consistent with and reflective of program goals.
 2. Enable peer helpers to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired during training.
 3. Enhance the personal growth and positive development of peer helpers and helpees alike.
 4. Recognize and accommodate the need for ongoing opportunities for continued learning and training.
 5. Establish safeguards to protect peer helpers from burnout role confusion, inappropriate assignments, or manipulation.

D. Supervision: Once peer helpers have begun to provide services, it is imperative that they receive regular, ongoing supervision from program staff. In addition to regularly-scheduled sessions, staff should be available to provide supplemental supervision and support as needed. Major goals of supervision include the following:

1. Enable program staff to monitor program-related activities and services.
2. Enhance the effectiveness and personal growth of peer helpers.
3. Encourage peer helpers to share with, learn from, and support each other in the performance of their helping roles.

III. Program maintenance

Once the program has been established, program staff should take steps to ensure its continued survival, improvement, and success. These steps include the following:

A. Evaluation: In order to document program-related activities and services, to assess the impact of the program with reference to its goals, and to provide grounds for future revision, the program should develop and implement a formal evaluation plan. The evaluation plan typically includes two components.

1. Formative Evaluation: Formative evaluation provides an accurate picture of what happened in connection with the program. Formative data includes information in such areas as number of peer helpers and helpees involved; program staffing and organization; selection procedures; nature and extent of training; amount and types of services provided; and other program-related activities.
2. Summative Evaluation: Summative evaluation determines the degree to which the program has been successful in achieving its goals, and typically assesses the impact of program participation upon both peer helpers and those who have received program services. Such assessment can be qualitative (questionnaires, opinion surveys, and so forth) and/or can employ "hard" quantitative indices of program impact. In a school-based program, for example, summative evaluation might assess impact in such areas as student attitudes or behavior, grade point average, absenteeism and dropout rates, or incidence of disciplinary referrals.

Both formative and summative evaluation data should be utilized by program staff in a periodic effort to determine whether and how the program needs to be revised for future improvement.

- B. Public Relations: Program staff should make a concerted, ongoing effort to keep those in the program setting, as well as interested individuals and organizations in the broader community, well-informed about the program, and supportive of its goals. Techniques for strengthening programmatic public relations might include production of a program brochure or newsletter, maintenance of media contacts, involvement of community representatives in training or program services, and community outreach projects.
- C. Long-Range Planning: Program staff should engage in long-range planning to ensure that in the future, the program does not die, but rather becomes stronger and more firmly integrated within the program setting as time goes by. Key factors to consider include the following:
 - 1. Staffing: It is important that the success of the program not be dependent upon the particular person or personality, who happens to be coordinating it at any given time. In this regard, a sense of program ownership should be maximized through such strategies as the formation of a program advisory committee, and there should always be at least one individual within the program setting who is prepared to assume coordination responsibilities in the event of staffing changes.
 - 2. Funding: The program should (a) have a secure and consistent funding base, and/or (b) have contingency plans to provide for continued operation in the event of reduced or nonexistent funding.
 - 3. Peer Ownership: The program should strive to maintain the level of ownership and involvement on the part of the peer helpers themselves; if peers feel directly responsible for the success and survival of the program, they are unlikely to allow it to perish.

Appendix C

National Peer Helpers Association

Code of Ethics

For Peer Helping Professionals

June, 1990

Professionals who are responsible for implementing peer helping programs shall be people of personal and professional integrity. As a minimum, the NPHA believes the Code of Ethics for Peer Helping Professionals shall contain the following and be evidenced by commitment to and pursuit of:

1. A philosophy which upholds peer helping as an effective way to address the needs and conditions of people.
2. The individual's right to dignity, self-development, and self-direction.
3. Excellence in program development and implementation through:
 - Strong positive rapport with peer helpers.
 - Appropriate background, training and skills.
 - Personal commitment and energy.
 - The use of professionals with expertise and experience in human relations training.
 - The use of a proven curriculum for training, supervising, and supporting peer helpers.
4. The development of a nurturing personality which:
 - Reflects a positive role model and healthy lifestyle.
 - Rejects the pursuit of personal power or gain at the expense of others.
 - Respects copyright and acknowledgment obligations as they pertain to peer helping resources and ideas.
 - Adheres to the ethical and legal obligations of confidentiality.
 - Strives to employ the peer helping philosophy in all life situations.
5. The promotion of a realistic understanding by both internal and external audiences of the benefits and limitations of a peer helping program.

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TEACHING HELPING SKILLS

a variety of roles including tutors, small group helpers, big brothers/big sisters, and special friends. Cross-age and cross-grade level projects or assignments are common. Older middle school students can work with first-year middle school students or in the elementary school. The helping skills learned in this program can be applied in everyday life outside designed projects or helping activities.

Suggestions for organizing, administering, and evaluating a middle school peer helper program are provided in this program leader's guide.

Helping Skills for Middle School Students is the accompanying student book which also is available from Educational Media Corporation®. A developmental model for peer helping which places less emphasis on students in crises and more emphasis on helping them in advance of serious problems is presented in the student book, complete with additional training activities for each chapter.

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